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## Modernising Opera Recuperation and Renewal in Venice, 1951-1961

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**Modernising Opera  
Recuperation and Renewal in Venice, 1951-1961**

**Harriet Anne Boyd  
King's College London  
2014**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
Music

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## Abstract

This thesis explores operatic production in Venice's nascent postwar culture (1951-1961). Although long sidelined as a site of political authority, Venice took on new life in the twentieth century, both as a hub of avant-garde activity and as a site of cultural recuperation. I begin with the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (1951), an opera that provoked anxieties over memory and cultural heritage in a society trying to efface the past and embrace future-orientated mass media. Echoes of the past in the postwar period reverberate in the second chapter, which is on the revival of Verdi's *Attila* (1951). The performance became a focal part of contemporary concerns with posterity: an exhumed classic, a vehicle for rewriting Risorgimento history and a media event. The third chapter focuses on the premiere of three one-act music theatre pieces, commissioned by the 1959 music festival to alleviate widespread calls of opera crisis. Critics perceived the resultant works to be grounded in ideas of openness, diversity and eclecticism—a proto-*neoavanguardia* distinct from resurgent high modernism. The final chapter takes as its topic the premiere of Luigi Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* (1961). Heralded by some as opera's salvation, *Intolleranza* was premised on a noisy realism that served not just as a locus of political memory, but also as a regeneration of older artistic forms in response to the increasing hegemony of new mass entertainments. In sketching these four case studies, I construct a specific picture of opera at mid-century, one forged in the aftermath of war and in response to cultural and technological changes unforeseen in the Fascist period. I want to suggest, furthermore, a fleeting revitalisation of operatic culture, one filtered through a lugubrious rhetoric born of crisis, museography and dangerously beguiling mass media.

## Table of Contents

Lists of Figures and Music Examples	5
Acknowledgements	6
Prologue: Futurism in Venice, 1924	9
1. Noisy Legacies	45
2. Presenting the Past: Stravinsky's <i>The Rake's Progress</i> , 1951	71
3. <i>A futura memoria</i> : Verdi's <i>Attila</i> , 1951	104
4. Staging Crisis: <i>Opera aperta</i> and the Venice Biennale Commissions, 1959	142
5. Remaking Reality: Echoes, Noise and Modernist Realism in Luigi Nono's <i>Intolleranza 1960</i> , 1961	167
Conclusion: Out of the Ashes: Opera in Postwar Venice	197
Bibliography	204

## Figures

Prologue 1. *Arabau Barù* 1 (1924), 1.

Prologue 2. *Arabau Barù* 1 (1924), 3.

Prologue 3. Fortunato Depero, *Anihccam del 3000* (1924).

Prologue 4. Enrico Prampolini, *Psicologia delle macchine* (1924).

1.1 Facades of the Biennale (1914 and 1932).

2.1 Igor Stravinsky's funeral, Venice (1971).

2.2 Igor Stravinsky's funeral, Venice (1971).

3.1 *Corriere della sera* (24 January 1951).

5.1 Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza 1960* (1961).

5.2 Sketch for Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza 1960* (1961).

## Music Examples

2.1 Igor Stravinsky, *The Rake's Progress* (1951).

2.2 Igor Stravinsky, *The Rake's Progress* (1951).

3.1 Giuseppe Verdi, *Attila* (1846).

5.1 Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza 1960* (1961).

5.2 Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza 1960* (1961).

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## Prologue

### Futurism in Venice, 1924

La crise militaire est peut-être finie. La crise économique est visible dans toute sa force; mais la crise intellectuelle, plus subtile, et qui, par sa nature, même, prend les apparences les plus trompeuses.<sup>1</sup>

#### The future of old media

Tucked away in the recesses of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice is a one-off Futurist periodical. The accumulated dust and lack of wear belies its significance. Entitled *Arabau Barù* (an idiosyncratic greeting used by the Venetian Futurists),<sup>2</sup> the periodical was produced in Venice by local activists Renzo Bertozzi and Paolo Foscari to generate publicity on the eve of a musico-theatrical event at the city's Teatro Goldoni on 25 January 1924. The publication marks a neglected moment in Futurism's history. Styled as a four-page broadsheet, it exhibits the black and red text and typography favoured by the Futurists (see Figure 1). The title typeface suggests both velocity and auditory volume: 'Arabau' rises from a small to large point size, and the letters of 'Barù' are distributed on various horizontal lines, as if to suggest their transcription on a musical staff. The edition's subtitle reads 'argomento dei futuristi veneziani esce quando vuole e può' (Exposition of the Venetian Futurists, appearing when it wants to and can); inscribed in a vortical shape that resembles the electroacoustic loudspeaker, it too suggests its sonic realisation. Slogans are scattered across the page: to the left is the play on words 'Marciare, non marcire' (March, don't rot), taken from the 1915 manifesto 'Il teatro futurista sintetico'; this is mirrored by 'Tutto il futurismo!?!' to the right.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'The military crisis is perhaps over. The economic crisis is visible in all its force; but the intellectual crisis, which is more subtle, by its own nature, perhaps, takes on the most deceptive appearance'; Paul Valéry, 'La crise de l'esprit (1918)', *Variété* 1 (1924), 15.

<sup>2</sup> The Venetian origins of the slogan have been contested by, for example, Tiziana Migliore, 'Macchina di visione. Futuristi in Biennale', in *Macchina di visione. Futuristi in Biennale. Scegli una stella, chiamala Futurismo, viaggerà*, eds. Migliore and Beatrice Buscaroli (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), 25-117. She claims that the phrase came from the Romagna (36).

<sup>3</sup> The statement in the manifesto, signed by F. T. Marinetti, Emilio Settemelli and Bruno Corra, reads: 'War—Futurism intensified obliges us to march and not rot (*marciare, non marcire*) in libraries



Figure 1: *Arabau Barù* 1 (1924), 1. © Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Further reproduction prohibited.

Advertising for the forthcoming Goldoni performance by *Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista*—the latest incarnation of Futurist theatrical experimentation—occupies most of the front page. The date, location, programme and protagonists are listed along various axes and in various shapes. Indeed the juxtaposition of texted vortices and diagrams suggests what we might call a sonic visuality: loudspeaker symbols frame writing throughout the document, and other text is arranged to suggest radiating waves.<sup>4</sup> On turning the page, the reader is greeted with similar effects. Previously

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and reading rooms. THEREFORE WE THINK THAT THE ONLY WAY TO INSPIRE ITALY WITH WARLIKE SPIRIT TODAY IS THROUGH THE THEATRE'; *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. and trans. Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 183.

<sup>4</sup> This visual aspect is something the periodical shares with other Futurist manifestos, which, as noted by Sara Iacobitti and Irene Morelli, are characterised by their 'Aspetto grafico innovativo, di forte impatto comunicativo ed utilizzo dei mass-media: Marinetti, si è detto, è stato un precursore per

published texts are recycled, jostling with the newly commissioned. On the inside leaf is the 'Manifesto futurista ai Veneziani' (1910), signed by F. T. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Luigi Russolo; beneath is a more extended piece by Marinetti, 'Discorso futurista ai Veneziani'. The remainder of the document features a mixture of poetry, art and reportage. The back page has advertisements for local businesses, each engaging with the Futurist theme: a 'Bar americano' that sells 'Bibite esotiche, fantastiche, futuriste', a photography studio extols the Futurist's contribution to the medium.<sup>5</sup>

Two items in the periodical stand out in particular. Both are located on the third page, and both make the latent aurality of the document explicit (see Figure 2). Top centre is a Futurist poem in the style of 'parole in libertà' (words set free), entitled 'Caserma + Strada'. The poem articulates a series of distinctions: between silence ('Silennnizio') and noise on the one hand, and onomatopoeia ('drin dirindin drindrinnn') and music ('la strada la strada che canta') on the other. Again the iconography of loudspeakers and radiating patterns suggests dynamism and aural velocity. Even more significant is an enlarged text at the centre of the page, one that articulates this iconography explicitly. Dedicated to the Venetian Futurist musician Giulio Salom, it outlines what 'la musica dell'avvenire' (the music of the future) will be: 'from radiotelegraphic waves emanates the music of the future [...] all the celestial symphonies are condensed in the magnificent and monstrous mouth of the loudspeaker [...] wires + antenna + lightning x long kisses in the clouds [...] speed'.<sup>6</sup> The future of music resided in the new sounds and communicative means of the latest technologies; this was the year, not incidentally, of the advent of national radio broadcasting.<sup>7</sup>

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l'approccio ai mezzi di comunicazione, utilizzando il manifesto come strumento di informazione capillare'; 'I manifesti: forza e contraddizione del futurismo', in *Futurismo e musica: una relazione non facile*, eds. Antonio Rostagno and Marco Stacca (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2010), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Whether the adverts suggest local support for the Futurists (as Willard Bohn claims in *The Other Futurism: Futurist Activity in Venice, Padua and Verona* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004], 41) or a certain opportunism is another matter.

<sup>6</sup> 'dalle onde radiotelegrafiche si sprigiona la musica dell'avvenire [...] tutte le sinfonie celesti sono condensate nella bocca magnifica e mostruosa dell'altoparlante [...] fili + antenne + lampi x baci lunghi sulle nuvole [...] velocità'; *Arabau Barù* 1, 3.

<sup>7</sup> A royal decree for the state's use of radio had been issued in 1923. On 27 August 1924, the Unione Radiofonica Italiana (URI) was inaugurated in Rome; it began broadcasting regular news on 6 October 1924.



Figure 2: *Arabau Barù* 1 (1924), 3. © Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo—Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Further reproduction prohibited.

The periodical thus touches on key areas of Futurism that had survived into the mid-1920s: the boundaries between visuality and aurality, writing and sound, silence and noise; the use of technology; the aesthetics of speed; and the notion of an art of the future. Rather than a break with previous decades, the 1920s in many ways saw an intensification and refinement of earlier innovations, in addition to new preoccupations: from telephones, railways and wireless communication, to jazz, radio and the gramophone.<sup>8</sup> In the document's style and contents, *Arabau Barù* exhibits the

<sup>8</sup> While the particular socio-political context of the postwar period changed aspects of Futurism's self-identity and artistic programme, I would argue that there is no readily definable 'secondo' Futurism. This is not to suggest that Futurism did not evolve, but rather that there are not two discernible phases divided by war. For an account of Futurism's various transformations, see Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 232-65. Although I would not go as far in emphasising the rupture of war, I agree with Poggi's point that in the 1920s there was a turn to erotic desire and religion, love and sentiment that had been effaced in the pre-war period. The articles in a recent edition of *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* also try to move away from the division of Futurism into two periods, claiming that 'This divide is a consequence of seeking to preserve early Futurism from the stain of its connection to the subsequent Fascist regime'; Walter Adamson and Ernest Ialongo, 'Introduction: Reconsidering Futurism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18/4 (2013), 389-92, here 391. Italy in the early 1920s was also witness to intensifying worker militancy and unrest, economic recession, rightwing coups and fears of socialist revolution; for more on this, see Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

increased pace, impact and ephemerality of urban life.<sup>9</sup> The periodical is part display object, part advertisement, part manifesto and part newspaper. Such a multifaceted document was, in itself, nothing new.<sup>10</sup> What is important is how an older medium—that of the *numero unico* periodical, a form going back into the nineteenth century—was reframed and reinvented within Futurist discourse. These publicity outlets formed part of a wider attempt by the movement to exploit and control the media that surrounded an event.

Starting from a seemingly peripheral Futurist object, I want to begin the thesis from a material history that grounds the moment in the press, periodicals and other media that prescribed and discussed this Futurist event in Venice. I suggest an exemplary role for the Teatro Goldoni event: this collision of old and new media proved to be crucial both to the success and, paradoxically, to the eventual undermining of the movement. From this perspective I will then approach the supposedly more immaterial aspects of the performance—its reconfigurations of music and noise, sound and silence—and suggest that the event left material traces of an audible legacy. In focussing on one particular event and undertaking an archaeology of the media networks that surround it, I can also start to construct a localised history of an urban centre of Futurist activity that is both typical and idiosyncratic.<sup>11</sup> Venice is important here as a locale that emphasised the contradictions and ambivalences at the centre of the Futurist movement and of the interwar milieu generally. Although denounced by the Futurists as *passatista* in the same way as Rome and Florence, by 1924 Venice had its own significance as a site of Futurist insurgence and as an

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<sup>9</sup> The Futurists themselves called the newspaper a ‘synthesis of a day in the world’s life’; see Marinetti’s manifesto ‘Distruzione della sintassi—immaginazione senza fili—parole in libertà’ (1913), reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Renato Poggioli writes that such periodicals—ones that contained manifestos and slogans and had a relatively short run and circulation—were left over from romanticism. The subtle difference is that the avant-garde incarnation inhabited a relatively detached position in relation to society (they cajoled and attacked the public), whereas the nineteenth-century version sought to lead its readership from one step ahead; see Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981 [1968]), 21-23.

<sup>11</sup> An important intervention to the focus on more industrial centres is Adamson’s *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Investigating the first two decades of the century, he argues that although Milanese Futurism may have had the largest impact internationally, it was the Florentine avant-garde that had a greater impact in Italy (4); see also Bohn, *The Other Futurism*. The notion of ‘media archaeology’ is discussed in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). They claim that studying media often means focussing on the new and forgetting about the past, whereas ‘media archaeologists have begun to construct alternate histories of suppressed, neglected, and forgotten media’ (3). They advocate a focus on the auditory, which they see as neglected by the focus on screen cultures and visuality.

emerging location of Fascist culture with the increasing prominence of the Biennale in cultural life. More importantly, straying off the beaten track of the usual industrial metropolises (namely Milan and Turin) favoured both by the Futurists and by later scholarship will direct our attention to a comparatively neglected moment in Futurist pursuits and foreground some of its less-known figures.<sup>12</sup>

I will begin by suggesting that 1924 was a pivotal year for Futurism in the city, and that the movement itself was at that time entering a period of crisis—something intensified in this particular locale. The crisis was fuelled by the Biennale’s renewed hostilities toward the movement, and the negotiations taking place with the increasingly powerful Fascists. In the second part of this Prologue, I will return to the evening at the Goldoni, presenting a detailed account of the performance and investigating how the noisiness in the auditorium intersected with the noisy works performed onstage. I consider how the discourse that surrounded this sonic aspect of the event—noise and music, sound effects, and *la musica dell'avvenire*—was part of a broader crisis of musical language taking place in public debate. I will proceed with an account of how this exacerbation and manipulation of crisis enveloped every aspect of the performance: from the state of contemporary theatre and the relationship with new media to the broadening of sensory experience. Finally, I will argue that it was this multiple cultural crisis—a discourse that even undermined Futurism’s own precarious position—that fed the movement’s rhetoric, both enabling its success and leading to its eventual demise. In other words, as a chasm opened between what the movement proselytised and what it practised, a series of contradictions at the heart of Italian Futurism were exposed: between aesthetics and event, old and new, music and noise, media enterprise and false advertising.

### **Touring in transition**

The January performance at the Teatro Goldoni, directed by the actor-impresario Rodolfo De Angelis, formed part of a twenty-eight city tour of the peninsula, one that began at the Teatro Trianon in Milan on 11 January. The modernisation of the railways and introduction of new modes of transport were enabling this trend for large-scale touring; companies such as Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista were able to

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<sup>12</sup> This need for a move away from the usual cities and the ‘heroic’ years of 1909-15 is also advocated in Adamson and Ialongo, ‘Introduction: Reconsidering Futurism’.

undertake unprecedented tours into the further reaches of the peninsula, performing in different theatres night after night. The production was overseen—as always—by Marinetti, who was accompanied by the poet and writer Francesco Cangiullo, artists and scenographers Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini, musicians Franco Casavola and Silvio Mix, and actors De Angelis and Diana Mac Gill. The programme on tour contained an assortment of the main genres of Futurist experimentation: ‘Parole veloci’, mechanical ballets, provocative declamation, tactile and sensory dramas, and poetry readings.

The company’s journey around the country was, as in Venice, often accompanied by one-off periodicals and pamphlets, some officially sponsored by the Futurists, others independently produced. These supplemented the general press coverage with additional material (manifestos and event information) and provided forums for discussion. Yet the performance in Venice stood out within this well-publicised *tournée* for the weight of press material. Several months after *Arabau Barù*, a second Venetian periodical devoted to local Futurists was also inaugurated, one with a larger print run: *La nuova Venezia* ran for eighteen issues between 25 April 1924 and 14 September 1925. Conceived as a successor to *Arabau Barù*, the review was also styled as a broadsheet newspaper and edited by Bertozzi and Foscari (although the latter left after the fourth issue). Part of the periodical’s *raison d’être* was a show of support for the Futurists in the face of increasing antagonism from the city’s Biennale. The conflict was coming to a head in 1924, as the art festival’s conservative governing body—now including several prominent Fascists—excluded the avant-garde movement.<sup>13</sup> Such print media were used to critique the movement’s increasing ostracisation from cultural life and to offer a defensive promotion of its agenda.

There was, then, much to be trumpeted by the local Futurists and much to be discussed and argued about in the city that year. This was perhaps due to Venice’s recent history with the movement. The city was not the type of noisy industrial centre Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista typically celebrated, but was nonetheless a sizeable Futurist stronghold. For over a decade Venice had been the object of Futurist ire, seen as exemplary of everything they were trying to expunge from the nation: dependent on

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<sup>13</sup> Although the Fascists did not officially take charge of the running of the Biennale until 1930, they quickly started to play a role in decision-making after coming to power in 1922.



tourism, locked in the past, anti-industrial and quiet.<sup>14</sup> The Futurist attack on the city had begun with the manifesto ‘Contro Venezia passatista’ on 27 April 1910, launched from the Campanile of San Marco on 8 July that year.<sup>15</sup> The manifesto attacked Venice as a symbol of the past, a place that existed as ‘a great nostalgic dream’. The Futurists offered to awaken the city from slumber, ‘to cure and cicatrise this magnificent, putrescent sore of the past’ and ‘to prepare for the birth of an industrial and military Venice that will rule over the Adriatic Sea’.<sup>16</sup>

Even for the Futurists, however, Venice as a city-showcase for contemporary art remained a highly desirable site for display. The events of summer 1910 were designed to coincide with an exhibition of Boccioni’s paintings at Ca’ Pesaro from 16 July to 20 October. A Futurist *serata* was also held at La Fenice on 1 August to coincide with the exhibition. At the event, Marinetti delivered his lecture ‘Discorso futurista ai Veneziani’ (later published in *Arabau Barù*), which articulated a Futurist vision for the city modernised with electric lighting and transport:

vogliamo ormai che le lampade elettriche dalle mille punte di luce taglino e strappino brutalmente le tue tenebre misteriose, ammalianti e persuasive! Il tuo Canal Grande diventerà fatalmente un gran porto mercantile. Treni e tram lanciati sulle grandi vie costruite sui tuoi canali finalmente colmati.<sup>17</sup>

[we wish now that the electric lamps of a thousand points of light would cut through and brutally tear at your mysterious darkness, so bewitching and persuasive! Your Grand Canal is destined to become a

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<sup>14</sup> Futurist rhetoric is again somewhat overstated; although not an industrial centre like Milan or Turin, Venice still had sizeable industrial sites on the Giudecca and its port. There was even a growing discussion in the 1920s and 30s—led by the *gruppo veneziano*—on the need for resurgent industry in the city. For more on this, see Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929–40* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 18–51; see also footnote 16 below.

<sup>15</sup> Official reports of the event by the Futurists speak of thousands of leaflets raining down on the huge crowd; however, I have failed to find any reference to the event in the local press.

<sup>16</sup> ‘un gran sogno nostalgico’, ‘guarire e cicatrizzare questa putrescente piaga magnifica del passato’ and ‘preparare la nascita di una Venezia industriale e militare che dominerà sul Mare Adriatico’; Marinetti, et al., ‘Manifesto futurista ai Veneziani’ (1910), in *Arabau Barù* 1, 2. Industrialisation and militarism would have a rather more complicated resonance in 1924 Venice. On the one hand, the city was intent on reasserting itself and looking to the future, having experienced aerial bombardment in the First World War. On the other hand, after the war, industry was being moved to Porto Marghera on the mainland, which dramatically increased in size as the 1920s progressed. This is discussed further in Chapter One.

<sup>17</sup> Marinetti, ‘Discorso futurista di Marinetti ai Veneziani’, in Luciano Caruso, ed., *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo, 1909–1944*, vol. 1 (Florence: SPES, 1980) [the collected documents are contained in a box, so there are no page numbers].

large trading port. Trains and trams will be launched on the major roads built on your canals, at last filled in.]

The *serata* was advertised through various press networks: a special issue of the Futurist journal *Poesia* was published for dissemination in the city, containing the anti-Venice manifesto and related material. This media hype around the exhibition played a part in its undoing, as Tiziana Migliore writes:

Ma, rispetto alle previsioni alimentate dalla propaganda futurista—tumulti, trombe e campane, megafono dal campanile di San Marco, in canal Grande e sulla terrazza del Lido—la mostra di Boccioni delude. Il tono dei manifesti e l'aggressività delle parole di Marinetti avevano creato un'incandescente atmosfera d'attesa, che non si tramuta poi in nessuna vera rivoluzione.<sup>18</sup>

[Compared to the forecasts fuelled by Futurist propaganda—riots, trumpets and bells, a megaphone from the bell tower of San Marco, on the Grand Canal, and on the terrace of the Lido—the exhibition by Boccioni disappointed. The tone of the manifestos and the aggressiveness of Marinetti's denunciation had created an incandescent atmosphere of expectation, which had not then transformed into a real revolution.]

It was as if the Futurists' media efforts were in part designed to bring about the very things they were forecasting. That such events, perhaps inevitably, fell short meant that in the end the media hype began to surpass the actual events. A corresponding discrepancy emerged between Marinetti's reports and what was recounted in the press: while the former claimed that crowds spilled out of the theatre and fought in the streets, many reporters stated that the auditorium had only been half full, and that the audience had simply dispersed at the end.

These tensions with the city resurfaced postwar, with Futurist artists returning to exhibit their work in July 1919. The occasion led to a resurgence of the movement in the city, and a renewal of its engagement with the Biennale. Depero turned down invitations to exhibit his art in the mid-1920s, during which time—thanks to the influence of Bertozzi and Foscari—Prampolini exhibited works at the Grandi Alberghi pavilion on the Venice Lido. Despite the 1924 hostilities with the Biennale, the Futurist artist Felice Casorati was granted a solo show that year. At odds with the conservative establishment that dominated institutions such as the Biennale, then,

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<sup>18</sup> Migliore, 'Macchina di visione. Futuristi in Biennale', 31.

Marinetti sought to re-ingratiate himself with Mussolini after having moved away from the Fascists in 1920.<sup>19</sup> By 1924, the aesthetic arm of the movement had begun to take prominence, eschewing statements of political ideology.<sup>20</sup> The reason for this vacillation between politics and aesthetics was in part expedient: with the increasingly controlling reach of the Fascist government, Marinetti wanted to retain a position in public life.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the Venetian locale, 1924 witnessed a spate of broader Futurist activity, primarily in the form of manifestos and pamphlets—the majority of which were related to music and theatre. Positioning themselves as inhabiting a transitional phase, the movement claimed to predict the art of the future and the path towards it.<sup>22</sup> Such soothsaying was made possible by the culture of crisis and threat of stagnation that were a prominent feature of the postwar Italian public debate.<sup>23</sup> It was also a response to the threat of being sidelined in the musical sphere, a threat spurred in 1923 by the formation of the *Corporazione delle nuove musiche*, headed by

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<sup>19</sup> Marinetti had founded the Partito Politico Futurista in early 1918; it had been incorporated into Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento* in 1919. After disastrous results for both groups in the November 1919 elections, the Futurists broke away from the regime and flirted again with the far Left. Antonio Gramsci even entered the debate on the political positioning of Futurism in the 1920s, claiming that the movement had achieved the revolutionary impetus in bourgeois culture the Marxist Left should have possessed among the proletariat; see Gramsci, 'Marinetti rivoluzionario?' *L'ordine nuovo* (5 January 1921).

<sup>20</sup> One way of retaining some political identity was to style themselves as precursors to the Fascist regime; see, for example, Piero Gobetti, 'Marinetti il precursore', *Il lavoro* (31 January 1924). In particular, the Futurists stressed how Mussolini's bombastic rhetoric and exploitation of cultural crisis were derived from their own habits and procedures; see Marinetti, 'I diritti artistici propugnati dai futuristi italiani!', *La nuova Venezia* 1/2 (April 1924), 2. Benedetto Croce also theorised the Futurists as precursors to the Fascists in his article 'Futurismo e fascismo', *La critica* (March 1924). In his analysis, both groups asserted themselves by taking advantage of a contemporary understanding of the moment as one of crisis. He discussed this further in 'Fatti politici ... e interpretazioni storiche', *La stampa* (15 May 1924). For more on Croce's theorising of a culture of crisis, see Axel Körner, 'The Experience of Time as Crisis: On Croce's and Benjamin's Concept of History', *Intellectual History Review* 21/2 (2011), 151-69.

<sup>21</sup> Scholars have recently emphasised Marinetti's underlying Fascist allegiance, despite these vacillations. For a discussion of Marinetti as a 'fervent Fascist' in the 1930s, see Ialongo, 'Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Futurist as Fascist, 1929-37', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18/4 (2013), 393-418. 1924 also saw the Primo Congresso Futurista, which took place in Milan on 23 and 24 November. The event was conceived as a massive media and publicity exercise, staged to enable the movement to reassert itself. Constant press releases and reports were dispatched; special edition periodicals styled as broadsheet newspapers were issued. Marinetti also released a new collection of his writings, entitled *Futurismo e fascismo* (Foligno: Franco Campitelli, 1924).

<sup>22</sup> Poggioli claims the avant-garde is characterised by this self-positioning between the present and the future; see Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 72.

<sup>23</sup> This culture is evident on every front, from social and cultural to economic and political crisis; the word 'crisi' was ubiquitous in the mainstream and literary press in 1924. Reinhart Koselleck, in his more general theorisation of the term, claims that a sudden proliferation suggests a perception of epochal change. Koselleck, 'Crisis', trans. Michaela Richter, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67/2 (2006), 357-400, here 358.

Gabriele D'Annunzio, Gian Francesco Malipiero and Alfredo Casella. Not only did this organisation have influence with the Fascists, but the music it proposed and supported was very different from that experimented with by the Futurists.<sup>24</sup>

1924 was therefore a year marked by uncertainty for the movement: in addition to antagonism from the cultural establishment, the increasingly fraught relationship with Fascism and the threat of irrelevance in musical culture, the tour's stopover in Venice produced its own resonances. The bombastic rhetoric characterised by *la musica dell'avvenire* that dominated their press dispatches was a means by which the movement sought to assert itself in a moment of quandary and crisis, amid a pervasive sense of unease that infiltrated the Futurists' own self-positioning.<sup>25</sup> But their maximalist outlook—the result of a postwar culture characterised by extremes—entailed a disavowal of all things on which they were most reliant: old technologies, media and sounds.

These contemporary concerns had a particular musical purview, clustered as they were around a predicament at the heart of postwar Italian musical life: forging a path to the future amid the ruins of the past. On the one hand, the avant-garde exploitation of nationalist uncertainty saw outspoken rejections of German culture and heritage, such as Mix's statement that 'it is time to stop the performance of works by dead authors (almost always Germans) who often bore and never interest because they do not correspond to the new sensibility of today [...] musical ruins that are much better kept in libraries'.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, there was a specifically Futurist rejection of the burden of Italian history. This sounds forth in a report by a young Venetian on the first Futurist theatrical outing in Venice: 'For us vigorous youths this heavy tradition, which has chained us down and to which we were subjected, has now come

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<sup>24</sup> The *Corporazione* espoused music in more traditional idioms and for standard orchestral instruments. More important, however, was that the official rhetoric of the group was notably subdued, going directly against the tone adopted by the Futurists; for more on this, see Guido Salvetti, *La nascita del novecento*, vol. 10 (*Biblioteca di cultura musicale: storia della musica*) (Turin: EDT, 1991), 295-97. For more on the *Corporazione*, see Chapter One.

<sup>25</sup> If the Futurists saw themselves as inhabiting a transitional moment, that is also how they exploited the contemporary rhetoric of crisis. Koselleck calls this a variant of the crisis concept, one that represents 'a historically unique transition phase. It then coagulates into an epochal concept in that it indicates a critical transition period after which—if not everything, then much—will be different'. Furthermore, this concept of crisis is often tied up with a 'prognosis of the future'; Koselleck, 'Crisis', 371-72.

<sup>26</sup> 'che sia davvero l'ora di finirla con l'esecuzione di musiche di autori morti (quasi sempre tedeschi) che molto spesso annoiano e non interessano mai perché non rispondenti alla nuova sensibilità d'oggi [...] musiche ruderi che stanno assai meglio nelle biblioteche'; Silvio Mix, cited in Daniele Lombardi, *Il suono veloce: futurismo e futurismi in musica* (Milan: Ricordi, 1996), 86.

to an end [...] Under our eyes the classical repertoire is laid to ruins; the enormous heap of outdated, romantic trash tumbles down'.<sup>27</sup> Crisis in 1924 was all about confronting the multifarious and troublesome pasts that jarred with the avant-garde nationalist visions for the postwar period.

## A night at the Teatro Goldoni

A heavy police presence appeared at the doors of the Teatro Goldoni, searching those who entered and ready to arrest troublemakers. The audience was provoked before anything had taken place on stage: several seats were sold to multiple buyers, mistletoe was placed over others and some even had glue smeared over them. At the time the protagonists came onstage, many in attendance were unseated and restless. Such antagonism had become common on the tour, prompting a predictable cycle of events. At the opening night in Milan, the performance had to stop altogether when fighting broke out in the auditorium. 'Then there was a commotion. Flying fists. There were widespread screams', one reporter noted, 'In ran the police, arresting the most riotous'.<sup>28</sup> There was disagreement among press reports, however, as to the level of mayhem the Futurists managed to achieve at each city stopover. Descriptions of the night at the Goldoni were contradictory: *La gazzetta di Venezia*, for example, claimed that the event took place 'with relative tranquillity' before admitting that 'A large-scale search warrant had been put in place to prevent any disorders that could occur'.<sup>29</sup>

Despite these precautions, the police confiscated at the door various projectiles. *Il gazzettino* went into detail:

Al bigoncio, fin dalle otto, doppio cordone di carabinieri per preventivo esame alle tasche di tutti quelli che entravano, signore escluse. Marinetti e compagni, ammaestrati dalle prove di Milano, Firenze, ecc., s'erano raccomandati alla questura perché non entrassero in teatro [...] frutti di stagione. Le perquisizioni personali hanno dato questi risultati: trenta patate, quarantasette aranci, sette torsi di cavoli, e un numero non ben precisato di carote. Uno studente recava sotto il

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<sup>27</sup> Originally in [Unknown] Breda, 'Il teatro futurista', *I pazzi* (22 February 1915), 2; reprinted in translation in Günther Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 218.

<sup>28</sup> 'Succede un parapiglia. Volano pugni. Da più parti si urla [...] Accorrono i carabinieri, si arresta il più riottoso'; 'Burrascosa serata futurista al Trianon', *Corriere della sera* (11 January 1924).

<sup>29</sup> 'Con relativa tranquillità' and 'Un largo servizio d'ordine era stato disposto per impedire che si verificassero disordini'; 'Il nuovo teatro futurista al Goldoni', *La gazzetta di Venezia* (26 January 1924).

soprabito [...] una testa d'ariete. Furono sequestrate anche le stelle filanti e i coriandoli.<sup>30</sup>

[Beginning at eight PM a double police cordon stood at the ticket office to search the pockets of all those who came in, ladies excepted. Marinetti and his companions had learned from their experiences in Milan, Florence, etc. [...] and had called on the services of the police to prevent any fresh produce being brought into the theatre. The body searches yielded these results: thirty potatoes, forty-seven oranges, seven cabbage cores and an unspecified number of carrots. A student bore under his overcoat [...] a ram's head. Streamers and confetti were also seized.]

Such accounts of audience behaviour were a constant feature of the news reports, often commanding as much space as the actual events onstage.

Once the official performance got under way, onstage sound was immersed in the cacophony that filled the auditorium. This, too, had been a feature of the tour since its opening night. In Milan,

scoppiò un applauso in tutta la sala e contemporaneamente squillò un suono roco di tromba d'automobile manovrata non si sa di dove. Questo suono seguì, a intervalli lungo tutta la serata.<sup>31</sup>

[as a round of applause broke out in the auditorium, the blast of a car horn came from an unknown source. This sound continued at intervals throughout the evening.]

The evening was thus 'restless and noisy, but not aggressive and violent'.<sup>32</sup> In his memoirs, De Angelis recounted a typical night on tour, giving a sense of the noise, performance and at times violence that characterised each event:

Le comode poltrone dei teatri e i capaci palchi, in quelle sere, non ospitavano più docili spettatori in ansia di divertimento, ma energumeni inferociti e recalcitranti; mattacchioni in vena di sgangherate follie; passatisti sul piede di guerra; giovani futuristi risoluti e maneschi; goliardi decisi alle più sfrenate goliardie; venerandi inorriditi; signore pro e contro; oratori improvvisati e inascoltati; e guardie, carabinieri, commissari, dappertutto, impotenti a reprimere l'iradiddio che accompagnava la recitazione degli attori, fatta di

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<sup>30</sup> 'La serata futurista al Teatro Goldoni', *Il gazzettino* (26 January 1924).

<sup>31</sup> 'Burrascosa serata futurista al Trianon'.

<sup>32</sup> 'inquieto e rumoroso ma non ancora aggressivo e violento'; *ibid.*

invettive, lancio di proiettili, di grida, di interruzioni sonore, e di un vocio lacerante, assordante, sibilante, da perforare i timpani del più provetto sordo. Né tale stato di emergenza finiva con la rappresentazione. Il fluido della fisicofollia veniva propagato dalle folle, per le strade, nei caffè, nelle piazze, ovunque vi erano agglomerati di persone. Sicché la città ne rimaneva scossa sino all'alba.<sup>33</sup>

[On those evenings comfortable seats in the theatres and the capacious boxes no longer housed docile spectators expecting entertainment, but angry and recalcitrant thugs; pranksters in the mood for wild follies; traditionalists on the warpath; young Futurists resolute and ready with their fists; goliards decided on the wildest goliardery; the venerable horrified; ladies for and against; orators improvising and unheard; and guards, police officers, commissioners—everywhere—powerless to repress the pandemonium that accompanied the actors' performances, made up of invective, projectiles, shouts, sonic interruptions and a piercing clamour, deafening, hissing, perforating the eardrums of even the deafest. Nor did this state of emergency end with the performance. The mass hysteria [*fisicofollia*] continued as the crowds spilled out into the streets, the cafés, the piazzas, wherever people were gathered. The city was in upheaval until dawn.]

Sheer noisiness was to become a trope in descriptions of such events. In Bologna, for example, the performance 'resulted in a couple of hours of hellish din. The noise, which began even before the show started, was intensified with sirens, car horns and the like, and culminated with the throwing of pans and abundant projectiles'.<sup>34</sup> Likewise in Turin, 'the clamour of so many opposing voices created a deafening cacophony, assisted by "modern instruments" that had been brought along, such as cowbells, claxons, car horns and sirens'.<sup>35</sup> In Trieste, 'the performance descended into a din of whistles, cries, noise'.<sup>36</sup> By the time the company arrived in Venice, readers of the national press might have had an inkling of what lay in store. But noise levels were still one of the most noteworthy aspects of the performance.

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<sup>33</sup> Rodolfo De Angelis, *Café-chantant: personaggi e interpreti* (Florence: La Casa Usher, 1984), 167-68. The degree to which the tension in the theatre continued out on to the streets is hard to ascertain. Despite numerous claims of fights in the Venetian streets, surveys of the local press have provided little evidence.

<sup>34</sup> 'risolta in un paio d'ore di gazzarra infernale. Il baccano, cominciato anche prima che si iniziasse lo spettacolo, si è intensificato con sirene, trombe di automobili e simili ed ha culminato col lancio di alcuni tegami e di abbondanti proiettili'; 'Gazzarra futurista a Bologna', *Corriere della sera* (15 January 1924).

<sup>35</sup> 'sono tante le parole che allora si incrociano da generare un chiasso assordante [...] Qualcuno ha portato degli strumenti moderni, come campanacci, claxon e trombe d'automobili, sirene, ecc.'; 'La serata futurista alle Folies Bergère [*sic*]', *La nazione* (18 January 1924).

<sup>36</sup> 'lo spettacolo si risolse soltanto in una gazzarra di fischi, di grida, di frastuoni'; 'Teatri—Politeama', *L'osservatore triestino* (21 January 1924).

One Venetian reporter claimed that although there was relative quiet at the start, some noise issued from the students in the gallery.<sup>37</sup> Another stated that the evening had been ‘three hours of uproar’, and that by the mid-point, ‘the noise rises to the highest pitch’.<sup>38</sup>

Such an unfolding of events had become routine in the course of Futurist theatrical development. The origins of Futurist theatre lay in the *serata*, from which had emerged numerous incarnations. Each new theatrical experiment took a similar format: poetry and manifesto readings, plays, musical performance and verbal provocation.<sup>39</sup> The evenings often resulted in organic material being thrown on stage, with fighting in the auditorium and occasionally even outside the theatre afterwards. Within limits, such reactions were part of the performance; but while the Futurists wanted to animate the audience, being pelted with vegetables was, it seems, another matter. The notion of theatre as event was specifically meant to encourage active engagement by the audience. Now an aesthetic movement first and foremost, the Futurists believed in the importance of a multidimensional, immersive and multi-sensory experience to activate a political awakening in the spectator.<sup>40</sup> The first manifesto devoted to the theatre, Marinetti’s ‘Il manifesto dei drammaturghi futuristi’ (11 January 1911), defined the old as antithetical to the new: pleasing the audience versus provoking hostility, theatre as a social occasion versus theatre as political activism. Yet this new model of theatre had historical precedents: in response to the

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Il nuovo teatro futurista al Goldoni’.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Tre ore di gazzarra’ and ‘Il baccano sale al più alto diapason’; ‘La serata futurista al Teatro Goldoni’.

<sup>39</sup> The first was ‘Il teatro di varietà’ (1913), seen as arising out of the stagnation and crisis of *fin-de-siècle* Italian theatre; signed by Marinetti, originally published in *Lacerba* (1 October 1913), reprinted in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 126–31. The next was ‘Il teatro futurista sintetico’ (1915), which sought to condense theatrical narratives into short and concise dramas lasting only a few minutes. Conceived as touring theatre, it emphasised improvisation and intuition; signed by Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra, originally published by the Istituto Editoriale Italiano (Milan, 1915), reprinted in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 183–96. The third incarnation was *Il Teatro della Sorpresa*, of which the offshoot was *Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista*. The focus was on speed and brevity for the purposes of surprise; see Marinetti and Francesco Cangiullo, ‘Il manifesto del Teatro della sorpresa’, originally published in Milan (11 October 1921), reprinted in *Sipario* 2/2 (1967), 10, 74.

<sup>40</sup> A series of recent articles by Mix had addressed the need to shake the apathy of both composers and the public. See, for example, Mix, ‘Musica d’oggi’, *Firenze futurista* 1/1 (26 March 1922), and Mix, ‘Ora basta!’ *Firenze futurista* 1/2 (26 May 1922); both reprinted in Stefano Bianchi, ed., *La musica futurista: ricerche e documenti* (Florence: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1995), 221–22 and 222–23.



sense of crisis within elite theatrical circles, Marinetti had sought inspiration from more popular domains such as the music-hall, variety show and *café-chantant*.<sup>41</sup>

Amid the noisy provocation, a series of musical works was staged: a hymn, a quasi-symphony and three ballets at the centre.<sup>42</sup> The opening ballet was Depero's *Anihccam del 3000* (subtitled 'Interpretazione riproduzione dei movimenti e rumori delle macchine', Interpretation reproduction of the movements and noises of machines), with music by Casavola. It told the story of two locomotives entering a station platform before breaking into a dance of love for the Stationmaster. If earlier Futurism had employed a hard-edged machine aesthetic, this later manifestation offered something more ambiguous; the locomotive protagonists may have portrayed machines come to life, but the life they lived was one of love and sentiment.<sup>43</sup> A conversation of onomatopoeic nonsense started up between the three main characters.<sup>44</sup> Depero composed a 'Canzone rumorista' for insertion into the ballet, comprising a series of onomatopoeic vocal sounds: 'HOPOTÒM TRO-TRO-TRO/HAPATÀM TRA-TRA-TRA/HUPÙTUM TRU-TRU-TRU'.<sup>45</sup> The scene was punctuated by the noises of a car engine and the whistling of a piccolo; noise thus represented the machine. Depero's locomotive aesthetic was characterised by a relationship between noise, movement and visual mechanicity: 'I adore the locomotive [...] The noise is a sharp blade ready to cut. The eyes are gyrating projectors with deeply penetrating rays. Elastic hands communicate the music of a new sensibility. Straight lines, curves and circles, perfect geometries of serrated, cogged and crenulated elements mirror the precise and infinite rhythms of the universe'.<sup>46</sup>

The few surviving photographs of the production show the locomotives dancing before a blank backdrop (see Figure 3). Meagre scenery was necessitated by

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<sup>41</sup> There is also a more transnational line of influence here: in drawing inspiration from the *café-chantant* (also a highly politicised genre), for example, Italian Futurism was again exhibiting a relationship to the Russian avant-garde.

<sup>42</sup> Both by Mix, the 'hymn' was entitled *L'innofuturista* and the 'symphony' *Bianco e rosso*.

<sup>43</sup> This idea of the protagonists of the theatre of the future as both mechanically mass produced and individualised is a precursor of the Fascist theatrical spectacles that were to emerge in the 1930s—above all, *18BL*; see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theatre of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Although the score and libretto are lost, parts of the work can be pieced together from surviving fragments and detailed descriptions by both the Futurists and the press.

<sup>45</sup> The full text is reprinted in Mario Verdone, ed., *Teatro italiano d'avanguardia: drammi e sintesi futuriste* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1970), 68.

<sup>46</sup> Originally published in Fortunato Depero, 'W la macchina e lo stile d'acciaio', in Depero, *Libro macchina imbullonato* (Florence: Salimbeni, 1978), 65-66; reprinted in translation in Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*, 470.

the limited budget and the portability required for touring.<sup>47</sup> The same year, Depero had also sketched designs (a model was built the following year) for his own noise-making machine, the 'Complesso plastico motorumorista'. Merging chemicals and fumes with accordions, castanets and barrel organs, the machine was an image both of industry and of popular-folk signifiers.

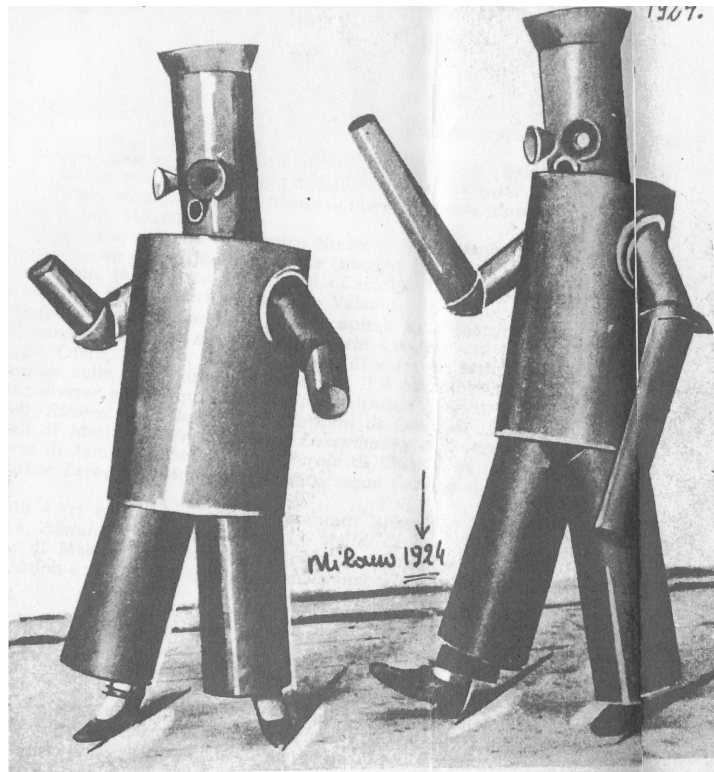


Figure 3: Depero, *Anihccam del 3000* (1924). © Courtesy of Casa Depero; Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto.

The other ballets employed similar themes. *Psicologia delle macchine* by Prampolini, with music by Mix, had already enjoyed numerous performances, having premiered at Milan's Teatro Odeon in 1923. Prampolini's perspective on the machine was more equivocal than Depero's: two photographs show tribal-style masks against a Cubistic jungle background (see Figure 4). If the stated intention was a more humanoid machine, along the lines of Depero's anthropomorphised locomotives, the

<sup>47</sup> Depero had mooted the notion of humanised locomotives the previous year, in the *Veglia Futurista* of 1923, and was soon conceiving a ballet for them (*Corteo di locomotive* and *Anihccam il macchinosauro del 3000*, outlined in his notes, *Studi per il Teatro Magico Depero*); see the publicity pamphlet for the *Veglia*, *La veglia organizzata dal gruppo futurista trentino alla casa d'arte Depero si ripete* (13 February 1923), held at the Casa Depero, Rovereto. See also Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*, 471.

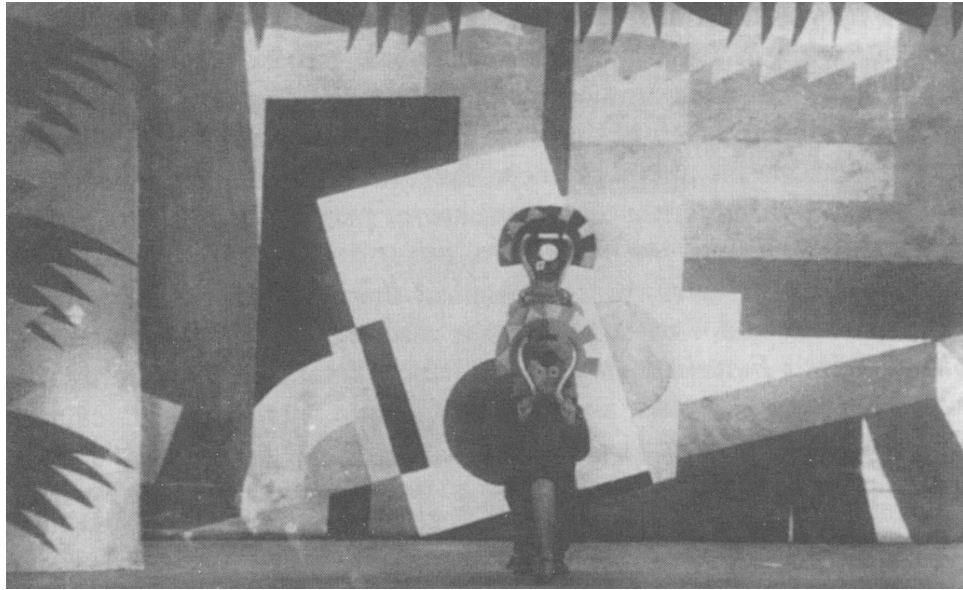


Figure 4: Enrico Prampolini, *Psicologia delle macchine* (1924). © Courtesy of CRDAV, Rome's Visual Arts Research and Documentation Centre at the MACRO Contemporary Art Museum, Enrico Prampolini Archive.

costuming suggested a pre-industrial Other. These somewhat contradictory perspectives on the early twentieth-century machine increasingly characterised the Futurisms that emerged after the war. *Macchinolatria* was an aspect of Futurist thought that had undergone endless rewriting, and 1924 witnessed further revision of the aesthetic. Prampolini had issued a rewritten version of Vinicio Paladini and Ivo Pannaggi's 'Manifesto dell'arte meccanica futurista' (originally published in *La nuova lacerba*, 20 June 1922). Crafted by the two architects of recent *modernolatria*, the 1922 version had been accompanied by illustrations that encapsulated different strands of an earlier Futurist aesthetic: a 'man-machine' entitled *Proletario* by Paladini, and an industrial landscape, *Composizione meccanica*, by Pannaggi. Their Marxist vision of the machine, as that which 'has marked a period of revolution in the economic structure of society', was radically rewritten by Prampolini.<sup>48</sup> The revised manifesto, which appeared in a 1924 special edition of the Futurist magazine *Noi*, presented a magical, surreal version of mechanicity.<sup>49</sup> The emphasis now lay, however, in the stylisation, regardless of whether the objects portrayed were somewhat old.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> 'ha segnato un periodo di rivoluzione nella struttura economica della società'; Vinicio Paladini, 'Estetica meccanica', *Noi* II. 1/2 (May 1923), 2.

<sup>49</sup> In Depero's defence of his new mechanistic vision, *Il nuovo fantastico*, delivered at the 1924 Congresso, he also drew a distinction between everyday reality and the possibility of a mechanical aesthetic which sought to 'elevate and transform matter into ideality, velocity, spiritual joy and magic' (quoted in translation in Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*, 470). Casavola and

The third and final ballet of the night, Prampolini and Casavola's *La danza dell'elica*, incorporated the emerging Futurist trope of aero-aesthetics.<sup>51</sup> A single protagonist was costumed as a huge silver aeroplane propeller. The brief plot was in four segments: preparation for the flight (*Allegro ma non troppo*), take-off (*Allegro vivo*), sensation of flying (second part of *Allegro vivo*) and, finally, the propeller shattering (*Più mosso* and *Presto*). As with the other ballets, the practical limitations meant reduced scenery (the same backdrop was employed for *Psicologia delle macchine*).<sup>52</sup> Again sound effects were used to heighten the sensory experience. A metal sheet suggested the shattering of the propeller and a wind machine evoked the soundscape of being airborne. In addition there was the noise of an internal combustion engine. A few reporters—perhaps sensationalising—claimed that petrol fumes were released into the auditorium to create a fully immersive sensory experience.

Noise and sound effects were thus central to the efficacy of productions that were otherwise somewhat meagre. As theatre critic and Puccini librettist Renato Simoni wrote a few years earlier of such auditory devices: 'noise as an expression and as a representation of the environment not visible to the audience, the noise that is a voice of confused distant crowds or maybe even of things, if you want to overcome the real, that can add effects, be they musical or terrifying, to a theatrical work'.<sup>53</sup> These effects, combined with the ambient noise of the auditorium, were to create the

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Marinetti's book *Avviamento alla pazzia: preparazione graduale attraverso i luoghi comuni* (Milan: Edizione Futuriste di Poesia, 1924) was also representative of this, containing short poems on the joy of fantasy and transcending reason.

<sup>50</sup> The designs for the 1924 ballets exemplified this lack of concern for using older ideas and materials: the scenery and mechanised protagonists echoed modernistic tics from earlier decades of the century. Depero's own designs for Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* (1917), and fellow Futurist Giacomo Balla's staging for Stravinsky's *Feu d'artifice* (1917), had employed similar devices.

<sup>51</sup> The *danza* was scored for violin, clarinet, piccolo, timpani and wind machine. A cymbal was originally scored for the sound of the propeller shattering, but Casavola said that it could be replaced by a metal sheet—which it was for the Venice performance.

<sup>52</sup> The rather primitive backdrops jarred with recent Futurist proselytising: in 'Manifesto della scenografia futurista' (1915), Prampolini had written, 'What will be completely new in the theatre as a result of our innovations is the *banning of painted scenery*. The stage will no longer have a coloured back-drop, but a *colourless electromechanical architectural structure, enlivened by chromatic emanations from a source of light*, produced by electric reflectors with coloured filters arranged and coordinated in accordance with the spirit of the action on stage'. Emphasis in original. Reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifesto*, 201.

<sup>53</sup> 'Che il rumore come espressione e come rappresentazione dell'ambiente non visibile agli spettatori, il rumore che è voce di confuse folle lontane o magari anche delle cose, se si vuole superare il reale, possa aggiungere qualche effetto o musicale o terrifico a un'opera teatrale'; Renato Simoni, 'Verbalismo e "rumori interni"', originally 'Il tamburo di fuoco di F. T. Marinetti' (6 June 1922), reprinted in Giuseppe Bartolucci, ed., 'I futuristi secondo la critica', *Sipario* 2/2 (1967), 18.

Futurist sonic event. At one level the focus was shifted from the works onstage to the theatre as a site of activism. Yet, at the same time, the somewhat traditional features of this noisy event—a hotly anticipated local premiere, the orchestral ballets, a night at the theatre—jarred with the uncompromising outline of musical progress elsewhere scripted by the Futurists. In other words, the performance and the contemporary debates it fed into exposed contradictions at the heart of the Futurists’ vision of *la musica dell’avvenire*, as well as a more deep-seated contradiction of the avant-garde: effacing aesthetics in favour of the event, while exploiting the media to give ever-more powerful voice to their own aesthetic purpose.

### *Le crisi musicali*

Noise was an aspect of the performance both elicited and controlled. There were two fields: the noise effects contained in the musical works and the noisiness of the auditorium. While enhancing the effect of what was onstage, both also contributed to its undoing. If the Futurists sought to counter the critics’ interest in sheer noisiness, rather than in what was happening onstage, by emphasising the importance of the event, that strategy jarred with the rhetorical emphasis being given to a new musical aesthetics. For many Futurists, music still bore the weight of tradition: it was for the stage and to be listened to attentively. This schism between Futurist music and the aesthetic of noise had been evident from the earliest manifestos. Whereas trained musicians such as Francesco Balilla Pratella were proposing a renovation of existing musical systems, visual artists such as Russolo advocated a total overhaul of music by aestheticising the noises of everyday life.

Theorising noise in relation to the specific locale of the early-twentieth-century metropolis had been a theme since the first manifestos. The city was depicted as a noisy hubbub, created by industrial modernity: ‘the mighty noise of the huge double-decker trams that rumbled by outside’ and the ‘roar of automobiles’ were hallmark sounds of Marinetti’s 1909 manifesto.<sup>54</sup> These new auditory experiences of everyday life called for the aestheticisation of sounds that reflected them. The search for novel timbres had first been theorised in Russolo’s manifesto ‘L’arte dei rumori’

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<sup>54</sup> Marinetti, ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (1909)’, reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 19-20.

(1913).<sup>55</sup> In the same mode as *Arabau Bari's musica dell'avvenire*, Russolo wrote of the need to use the latest technology in eradicating the past and forging a new musical language. The solution he proposed was noise generators—*intonarumori*—with which he claimed that, 'You can thus with new timbres entirely create the enharmonic system that will undoubtedly be the musical system of the future'.<sup>56</sup> Futurist noise, then, was enabled by the specifics of early twentieth-century mechanics.<sup>57</sup>

Being hyper-aware of their own noisy moment, however, also limited the continuing import of such theorisations: though representative of Futurism's first context, the situation of mechanical labour was rather different by 1924. The genres employed may have shown an obvious debt to tradition from the outset, but even the noise effects were growing old by this point. In an article of 1919, Russolo wrote again of 'l'arte dei rumori', noting how his earlier experiments with noise had been quickly accepted by the public, thus requiring the invention of ever-new sounds in order to surprise.<sup>58</sup> Wind machines and metal sheets had long been employed for ambient sound effects; and although *intonarumori* were used by Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista, they were placed within the orchestra, jarring with the Futurist rejection of traditional timbres. As if to suggest that the music of the tour was not as shocking and avant-garde as people had feared, many critics went out of their way to emphasise how well the music was received. In Venice, while *Anihccam* had elicited a mixed response of 'Shouts, whistles and even applause',<sup>59</sup> *Psicologia delle macchine* had been 'applauded by most of the audience'.<sup>60</sup> At the Rome performance, one reviewer stated that,

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<sup>55</sup> The emphasis on sound in the Futurists' commentary on modernity led to proposals for the reordering of the sensorium. Russolo wrote that the ear was the sense organ for navigating the modern city. A second manifesto, 'I rumori di guerra', published in *L'arte dei rumori* (1916), focussed on theorising the sounds of modern warfare. Here, too, Russolo argued for the primacy of listening: in the midst of war it was the ear rather than the eye that provided orientation.

<sup>56</sup> 'Si può così con timbri nuovi realizzare completamente il sistema enarmonico che sarà indubbiamente il sistema musicale dell'avvenire'; quoted in Maria Zanovello Russolo, *Russolo: l'uomo, l'artista* (Milan: Corticelli, 1958), 62.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the connection between noise and the machine in Futurist aesthetics, see Iacobitti and Morelli, 'I manifesti: forza e contraddizione del futurismo'.

<sup>58</sup> This perhaps explains why the manifestos on music and noise were subject to endless rewriting and revision; see Luigi Russolo, 'L'arte dei rumori: nuova voluttà acustica', *Dinamo* 1/4 (May 1919), reprinted in Caruso, ed., *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo, 1909-1944*, vol. 1.

<sup>59</sup> 'Urli, fischi, e anche applausi'; 'La serata futurista al Teatro Goldoni'.

<sup>60</sup> 'applaudito da gran parte del pubblico'; 'Il nuovo teatro futurista al Goldoni'.

I due balletti, uno di Prampolini e Mix, l'altro di Depero e Casavola, mi sembrarono pienamente riusciti. Sono divertenti. Nel secondo è notevole la musica.<sup>61</sup>

[The two ballets, one by Prampolini and Mix, the other by Depero and Casavola, seemed to me to succeed fully. They are enjoyable. In the second the music is remarkable.]

Another critic in Rome was rather more probing: he reported that *La danza dell'elica* was less futuristic than Debussy, and that 'the public contributed to increasing the phonic effect of the piece by imitating the internal combustion engines'.<sup>62</sup> Similarly the instrumental works on the programme 'did not raise any eyebrows', primarily because they were not as avant-garde as had been promised by the publicity material.<sup>63</sup> In Rome as in Venice, it was left to the audience to make the event, and to make it appropriately noisy.

Although there was nothing inherently problematic about the music not being particularly new—the onus was on the event, after all—the Futurists' undoing came instead from the hype that had been generated in the media prior to the performance. This contrast between expectation and the reality of the performance was exacerbated by the movement's musical futurology that year. *Arabau Barù* was not the only such mouthpiece; 1924 also witnessed a sudden proliferation of Futurist manifestos preoccupied with the direction of musical language.<sup>64</sup> One such document, by Casavola, dealt with the theme explicitly: 'La musica dell'avvenire', first published in *L'Ambrosiano*, was both a critique of the traditionalist tendencies of modern music and a statement about where progress could be found. Attacking Debussy, Strauss and Stravinsky for remaining trapped within the confines of old forms, Casavola offered a

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<sup>61</sup> Ettore Romagnoli, [Untitled], *L'Ambrosiano* (12 January 1924).

<sup>62</sup> 'La danza dell'elica, del maestro Casavola, a base di *tuff-tuff*, accompagnati dai movimenti di una *chauffeuse* ballerina è apparsa meno futurista di qualche pagina di Debussy; e direi che il pubblico ha contribuito ad accrescere l'effetto fonico del pezzo con imitazione dei motori a scoppio'; A. C., 'La serata futurista al Margherita', *Il messaggero* (21 January 1924).

<sup>63</sup> 'non hanno suscitato eccessivo scalpore'; *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> In 1924 alone were released: Casavola, 'Le atmosfere cromatiche della musica' (1924); 'Le versioni scenico-plastiche della musica' (1924); and 'La musica dell'avvenire' (1924). Casavola also wrote 'La musica illustrata' in 1924, as well as three theatre manifestos: 'Teatro degli istanti dilatati', 'Teatro immaginario' and 'Piccolo teatro'. See also Casavola, Anton Giulio Bragaglia and A. A. Luciani, 'Le sintesi vive della musica' (1924). Mix also test-ran three manifestos—the *Questioni musicali*—at the 1924 Primo Congresso Futurista, which were published posthumously: 'I. Verso le nuove forme dell'arte musicale' (19 August 1926); 'II. Le possibilità di rinnovamento della musica' (10 September 1926); and 'III. L'avvenire della musica orchestrale (Le possibilità d'oggi e nel futuro)' (26 September 1926).

vision of future music based on wholly new relationships between rhythm, melody and harmony. Realised through the ambiguous concepts of simultaneity, improvisation and individuality, such music was to reorder and re-stimulate the sensorium, rivalling the experiences becoming ubiquitous with new mass entertainments:

La musica è soprattutto movimento. I nostri ritmi devono essere decisi, insistenti, di netto disegno; ciascuno corrisponda ad un movimento fisiologico, meccanico, di precisa accentuazione, che è necessario sfondo ad ogni ideazione musicale.<sup>65</sup>

[Music is above all movement. Our rhythms are to be determined, insistent, of clear design: each corresponds to a physiological, mechanical movement, of precise accentuation—that is the necessary background for every musical conception.]

The two proposals of *la musica dell'avvenire* in 1924 thus exemplified the murky nexus between noise and music that characterised Futurist aesthetics, dividing work on sound that year. Whereas Casavola was concerned with the fundamentals of musical composition, *Arabau Barù* spoke of an electrical noise and the auditory detritus of modern communication; both carved out uncompromising positions within their respective fields.

But the question remains: if—to judge from the tour of Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista—the Futurists were as interested in ballets, hymns and symphonies as they were in the music of radio waves, wires and electricity, why did they employ such obstinate rhetoric? When they sought to infiltrate local and national media outlets with press releases and manifestos, why did they frame the material in such uncompromising terms? The postwar period was characterised by pessimistic diagnoses such as Gian Francesco Malipiero's pronouncement, that 'The future of music is closely related to the uncertainties that progress promises for humankind: what will music mean to a man who sips a cup of coffee on the moon, just for a change of air and distraction?'<sup>66</sup> Conversely, Mix proceeded with the bombastic

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<sup>65</sup> Casavola, 'La musica dell'avvenire', *L'Ambrosiano* (12 January 1924).

<sup>66</sup> 'L'avvenire della musica è strettamente legato alle incognite che il progresso prepara all'umanità; che cosa potrà rappresentare la musica a un uomo che va sorbire una tazza di caffè sulla luna, tanto per cambiare aria e distrarsi?' Gian Francesco Malipiero, in *Malipiero e le nuove forme della musica europea*, ed. Luigi Pestalozza (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni Unicopli, 1982), 198-99.



assertion that ‘enharmonic polychromatism’ was ‘the future of music and one of its boundless possibilities of renewal’.<sup>67</sup>

I want to suggest here that these two features surrounding the performance—the bombastic rhetoric of a musical future and the exploitation of the media—were part of the same preoccupation: that of taking charge amid a perceived crisis of musical language.<sup>68</sup> Italian musical debate in the 1920s was dominated by a concern with the current state of music culture and the perceived lack of compositional direction. Futurist rhetoric sought to offer certainty amid this contemporary perception of crisis, while simultaneously inhabiting an unstable, precarious position—adrift from the present, but not yet in the future. The atmosphere of uncertainty was what enabled the Futurists to assert power and articulate their futurology; such an avant-garde vision of being in transition, theorist Renato Poggioli notes, is the ‘favourite myth of an apocalyptic and crisis-ridden era’.<sup>69</sup>

The notion of *la musica dell'avvenire* was itself old by 1924, having previously been identified with the writings of Wagner in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> As was becoming customary, however, the Futurists refashioned the concept in response to the postwar milieu, eliminating any reference to the term’s past. The movement’s reinvention of the concept exploited the perceived crisis following pronouncements of the death of Italian opera. Although opera crisis also had a long nineteenth-century history (it had begun to accompany the later stages of Verdi’s career, for one thing), 1924 was perceived as a climactic moment on account of the ailing health of Puccini,

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<sup>67</sup> ‘policromatismo enarmonico’ and ‘l’avvenire della musica e una delle sue nuove possibilità sconfinata di rinnovamento’; Mix, ‘III. L’avvenire della musica orchestrale (Le possibilità d’oggi e nel futuro)’, reprinted in Bianchi, ed., *La musica futurista*, 231.

<sup>68</sup> The relationship between the avant-garde and crisis has been much theorised. See in particular Matei Calinescu, who wrote of ‘the avant-garde’s long and almost incestuous association with both the idea and the praxis of cultural crisis’; *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 123–24. Poggioli’s concept of the ‘agonistic moment’ of the avant-garde—its uncompromising position as regards present reality and the past—is of a moment arising directly from a culture of crisis (and thus giving rise to the importance of proselytising the future); see Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 65–67.

<sup>69</sup> Poggioli sees this positioning within a transitional state as inherent in the futurist tendencies of the avant-garde more generally; *ibid.*, 72.

<sup>70</sup> While the first formulations of the concept date from the early 1850s, it was Wagner’s use and analysis in his essay ‘La musique de l’avenir’ (1860) that had brought the phrase to greater prominence. The concept encapsulated two contemporary preoccupations: technical innovation and the aesthetic experience of modernity. For more on the nineteenth-century incarnation of the concept, see Körner, ‘Music of the Future: Italian Theatres and the European Experience of Modernity between Unification and World War One’, *European History Quarterly* 41/2 (2011), 189–212, and Francesca Vella, ‘Verdi’s *Don Carlo* as Monument’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25/1 (2013), 75–103.

supposedly the genre's last figure, who was to die later in the year.<sup>71</sup> Public discourse focussed on the consciousness of manifold musical crises: losing supremacy in the field of opera to countries such as Germany and France, and failing to find an alternative language to counteract that decline.<sup>72</sup>

The 1920s saw a number of books published on 'le crisi musicali'. In a review of Adriano Lualdi's *Viaggio musicale in Europa* (1929), Massimo Bontempelli weighed in: drawing a comparison with Giannotto Bastianelli's *La crisi musicale europea* (1912), he asked whether the various musical crises that had characterised the first part of the century in Italy shared a common origin. Despite his initial dismissal that 'In art there exists no crisis', he went on to suggest that the differences lay in genre: the current crisis was not one of operatic music, as 'the old spectacle is long dead'.<sup>73</sup> Instead, instrumental music was the topic of crisis. Yet even here Bontempelli retained a degree of optimism. Such evocations of crisis, he suggested, were unfounded; there was much to suggest a recent flourishing in Europe. If there was anxiety in Italy, it was perhaps because the country had yet to recapture the glory of its musical past:

E in Italia? L'Italia in crisi? Sentiamo piangerne, e magari rimpiangerne e invidiare l'Ottocento strumentale tedesco. Ma l'Italia sta alla testa della musica strumentale europea, e già da parecchi anni: quasi ha riacquisito la posizione di egemonia che ebbe ai tempi di Monteverdi e di Vivaldi.<sup>74</sup>

[And in Italy? Italy in crisis? We hear people mourn and even pine for it, and envy nineteenth-century German instrumental music. But Italy is now at the forefront of European instrumental music, and has been for several years: it has almost regained the position of hegemony it had at the time of Monteverdi and Vivaldi.]

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<sup>71</sup> For more on the discussion of the death of opera and Puccini in the first part of the century, see Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> For more on the crisis of musical language in 1920s Italy, see Lombardi, *Il suono veloce*, 83-92. The Futurists had co-opted this rhetoric of crisis for their own ends since the earliest manifestos. Francesco Balilla Pratella had long lamented the lack of an Italian counterpart to Elgar, Sibelius and Mussorgsky; see his 1910 'Manifesto dei musicisti futuristi', reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 31-37; and Balilla Pratella, 'Musica avanguardista e futurista europea (28 March 1919)', *Dinamo* 1/4 (May 1919), reprinted in Caruso, ed., *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo, 1909-1944*, vol. 1.

<sup>73</sup> 'Nell'arte non esistono crisi' and 'il vecchio spettacolo è ben morto'; Massimo Bontempelli, 'Le crisi musicali' (September 1929), reprinted in Roberto Zanetti, *La musica italiana nel novecento*, vol. 3 (Busto Arsizio: Bramante Editrice, 1985), 1619-20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 1620.

Furthermore, Bontempelli added, where Italy did not have supremacy, such as in avant-garde music, it was because advance in that field was not desired.

Other writers held more pessimistic views. G. Eotti, for example, wrote that ‘the problem of music culture’ from the perspective of its ‘social effectiveness’—while a concern across much of postwar Europe—was being debated with particular fervour in Italy.<sup>75</sup> Contrary to Bontempelli, Eotti argued that at the centre was ‘the subject of modern music’, which was ‘undoubtedly one of the most important factors for the future social order of the nation’.<sup>76</sup> The relationship between music and nationalism was crucial: the critic claimed that programmes had been for too long filled with foreign musical modernism, with no space reserved for indigenous composers. Italian musicians were deemed to have been too preoccupied with exporting their work abroad, and the public too hospitable to foreign works. The issue of Italy’s future music was tied up with the future of the nation. It was this concern with the lack of an emerging national musical direction that the Futurists deliberately exploited, their rhetoric being one of providing a truly *Italian* path to the musical future.<sup>77</sup>

Musical crisis was directly implicated in broader questions of national identity and allegiance. The lack of consensus among critics as to what exactly was in crisis, and how to provide certitude, demonstrates how pervasive the perception of uncertainty was. First and foremost, Italy was seen as lacking the distinctive national styles of other European cultures. The most identifiable Italian tradition was that of opera, but many shared Bontempelli’s prognosis concerning its obsolescence. The problematic issue of Italian musical nationalism was only heightened by the aftermath of war.<sup>78</sup> Eotti, for example, had written in 1921 that ‘The Italian people, then, who emerge greatly exhausted from the grave consequences of war, are the first to re-establish their own moral capacity, reactivate the old and the new artistic heritage and resolutely oppose

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<sup>75</sup> ‘si dibattono con giustificata preoccupazione intorno alla problema della cultura musicale’ and ‘efficacia sociale’; G. Eotti, ‘La rinascita musicale italiana e la diffusione della musica moderna’, *Musica* 15/5 (1 March 1921), reprinted in Zanetti, *La musica italiana nel novecento*, vol. 3, 1587–89, here 1587.

<sup>76</sup> ‘a proposito della musica moderna’ and ‘senza dubbio uno dei più importanti fattori per il futuro assetto sociale della nazione’; *ibid.*, 1588.

<sup>77</sup> Again, Futurism’s maximalist rhetoric shaded contrary pictures: despite its heightened nationalism, the movement formed part of transnational cultural conduits and avant-garde trends.

<sup>78</sup> Broader questions of national and European identities were being reignited in the week leading up to the Goldoni performance with the death of Lenin on 21 January 1924, an event much remarked on in the Italian (and Venetian) press. January 1924 also saw a more local political crisis: the annexation of Fiume as a result of the Treaty of Rome (27 January 1924).

renewed attempts at “foreign infiltration” of their authentic musical forces’.<sup>79</sup> Such protectionist concerns were a widespread preoccupation of the interwar period. Although *la patria* had been of crucial significance to Futurism since its founding, it was the political chaos of the war’s aftermath that led to the movement’s heightened nationalism.<sup>80</sup> As the composer Giacomo Orefice put it: ‘And so it is that *nationalism*, a small nucleus before the war, combative but isolated, has now invaded every sphere of national life. That is why in music today we are all *nationalists*.’<sup>81</sup>

But such a state of crisis, as always, could give rise to a new creativity: ‘A crisis, therefore, of *nationalism*, which must be resolved—it is good to speak clearly, and proclaim loudly—not the *renunciation* of nationalism, which would be impossible and absurd, but the formation of a *new nationalism* that complies with those rudimentary criteria, that the history of the evolution of modern music and the most basic sense of practical expediency suggest’.<sup>82</sup> The Futurists’ exploitation of the contemporary crisis of musical style was thus intertwined with a crisis of national identity. The proclamation of an autochthonous music of the future became their rhetorical launch-pad: amid the fraught debates preoccupying much of the press, the Futurists sought to provide a voice of certainty and direction—even if that meant proclaiming a more extreme position than their artistic practice could deliver.

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<sup>79</sup> ‘Il popolo italiano, dunque, che con maggior fatica esce dalle gravi conseguenze della guerra, è quello che per primo ristabilisce la propria efficienza morale, che riattiva il vecchio ed il nuovo patrimonio artistico e contrappone decisamente le proprie autentiche forze musicali ai rinnovati tentativi d’infiltrazione straniera’; Eotti, ‘La rinascita musicale italiana’, 1587.

<sup>80</sup> These were the conditions that enabled the rise of Fascism. For more on Futurism’s impetus from interwar crisis, see Anna Barsotti, *Futurismo e avanguardia nel teatro italiano fra le due guerre* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 78-79. This exploitation of crisis was also a reincarnation of Futurism’s originary moment, which has been seen as ‘critically related to the larger social and political crisis of Italy’ characterising the *fin-de-siècle*, see Anne Bowler, ‘Politics as Art: Italian Futurism and Fascism’, *Theatre and Society* 20/6 (December 1991), 763-64.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Ed è perciò che il *nazionalismo*, piccolo nucleo prima della guerra, battagliero ma isolato, ha invaso oggi ogni campo della vita nazionale. È perciò che in musica tutti siamo oggi *nazionalisti*’;

Giacomo Orefice, ‘La crisi del nazionalismo musicale’, *Rivista musicale italiana* 2 (1917), 300-15, reprinted in Zanetti, *La musica italiana nel novecento*, vol. 3, 1566-73, here 1566.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Crisi, dunque, del *nazionalismo*; la quale, però, deve risolversi—è bene intenderci chiaramente, e proclamarlo ben alto—non già nella *rinuncia* al nazionalismo, il che sarebbe impossibile e assurdo, ma nella formazione di un *nuovo nazionalismo* conforme a quei criteri rudimentali, che la storia dell’evoluzione musicale moderna e il senso più elementare di opportunità pratica ci suggeriscono’; *ibid.*, 1572.

## Old genres and new media

Considered in this way, a similar process of exacerbating crisis can be seen taking place with the most obvious relics of the past: the use of theatre and ballet as springboards for the music of the future. These traditional genres enjoyed a surprising resurgence in 1920s Futurism; focussing on them offered a relatively neutral space, free from omnipresent discussion of the death of opera, as well as of Wagnerian hegemony. Furthermore, these genres were seen as relatively free from an entrenched national heritage: the new nationalism needed to be unencumbered by past preoccupations. In the heightened sense of national allegiance outlined above, the theatre was viewed as a genre strongly in need of a nationalist redress. Inscribing this lack of an Italianate tradition, the Futurist Bruno Corra wrote that:

Abbiamo sempre amato il teatro, malgrado tutti i suoi impacci, perché esso porta, comunque, la nostra creazione artistica al contatto immediato e brutale con la folla. Questa preferenza d'indole artistica si aggiunge ad una ragione nazionale. Non esiste un teatro di prosa *italiana*. Dipendiamo dall'estero.<sup>83</sup>

[We have always loved the theatre, in spite of all its shortcomings, because it brings our artistic creations into immediate and even brutal contact with the crowd. There is, however, a national purpose besides this artistic preference: there is no *Italian* prose theatre. We depend on abroad.]

The theatre also afforded the possibility of creating a total work of art, one that reordered the senses.<sup>84</sup> The emphasis was on disturbance and surprise; musical improvisation, gesture, dance and *parole in libertà* offered ways of achieving this. The theatre provided possibilities for bringing these various aspects together in a way that other, older genres and even some recent media—such as the radio—could not. At the same time the Futurists sought to engage with the new sensory experiences that mass

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<sup>83</sup> Corra, 'Creare il teatro italiano', *L'Italia futurista* 1/12 (15 December 1916); reprinted in Caruso, *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo, 1909-1944*, vol. 1.

<sup>84</sup> This was also the reincarnation of an earlier concept—the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—again derived from Wagner. The need to do away with Wagner's legacy, while also appropriating and refashioning many of his ideas, is continually present in Futurist discussion. The modern city had earlier provided the Futurist possibility for immersive synaesthesia; see Russolo, 'L'arte dei rumori'; Marinetti, 'Fondazione e manifesto del futurismo'; and Antonio Sant'Elia, 'Manifesto dell'architettura futurista' (11 July 1914), reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 160-71.

media were providing, incorporating aspects of these into the more traditional genres on which they focussed.<sup>85</sup>

A snapshot of the broader debate on contemporary Italian theatre can again be found in a book review. Writing on Luigi Tonelli's *Il teatro italiano dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, critic Guido Ruberti repeated the author's question: 'Does an Italian theatre exist?' Underpinning both book and review is a sense of anxiety. As Ruberti put it, 'Does there not seem something disconcerting in this, even if Tonelli believes that he can give [the question] an affirmative answer?'<sup>86</sup> The history of Italian theatre was one of loss, of nostalgia for a national tradition. This perspective was shared by another article on crisis released in January that year: an interview with the famous Italian actress Irma Gramatica, published in *Corriere della sera*.<sup>87</sup> Both she and the interviewer shared a sense of the stagnation and decline of the Italian theatrical establishment. Correspondingly, they suggested that there was no cohesive vision of where future projects might head. The only contemporary avenue of work mentioned was that of modernist theatre, which Gramatica dismissed for its intellectualism.

The surprising fact that theatrical renewal was taking place among the avant-garde and modernists was greeted with more attention elsewhere. Alfredo Casella, in an extended piece a year later, reflected on this unexpected phenomenon. He began by outlining the 'curious' fact that until recently the so-called 'avant-garde' had spoken of the theatre with disgust, holding a pessimistic outlook on the genre's future. And yet,

Oggi invece il problema teatrale musicale è ben diversamente considerato dai giovani musicisti italiani. Si potrebbe anzi affermare che esso costituisce la loro principale preoccupazione. Da ogni parte, si sente parlare di nuove opere già pronte alla pubblicazione, o per lo meno già in piena creazione.<sup>88</sup>

[Today, however, the issue of musical theatre is seen very differently by young Italian musicians. One might even say that it is their main

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<sup>85</sup> The Futurists addressed the new media more directly elsewhere: see Marinetti et al., 'Il manifesto del cinema futurista' (1916), reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 207-18; and Marinetti and Pino Masnata, 'La radia' (or 'Manifesto della radio'), *La gazzetta del Popolo* (22 September 1933).

<sup>86</sup> 'Non vi sembra tutto ciò sconcertante, anche se il Tonelli ritiene di poter dare ad essa una risposta affermativa?' Guido Ruberti, 'Esiste un teatro italiano?' *Il giornale d'Italia* (9 January 1924).

<sup>87</sup> 'La crisi del teatro: l'opinione di Irma Gramatica', *Corriere della sera* (17 January 1924).

<sup>88</sup> Alfredo Casella, 'Riabilitazione del teatro musicale in Italia', *Musica d'oggi* 12 (12 December 1925).

concern. On every side there is talk of new works ready for publication, or at least already in the process of creation.]

What is more, Casella also saw this resurgence as arising from cultural crisis: ‘such a theatrical revival is nothing if not a result of the clarifying tendency that now invades almost the whole of Europe, which is reacting with great violence against the final residues of the huge romantic crisis and against the damage caused by Wagnerism’.<sup>89</sup> But if ‘the great post-romantic crisis [was] coming to an end’, even Casella could not hide his surprise at ‘the renewed passion that currently animates our young musicians with respect to the demanding problem of theatre, until yesterday considered pessimistically, even with contempt—and which today underlies our musical renaissance’.<sup>90</sup> There might have been hope for the future of the genre, but there was also widespread uncertainty as to what form theatrical regeneration should take. For Casella, the way out of this predicament was music theatre that focussed on the music first and foremost (he even claimed Verdi’s *Falstaff* as a model). Theatre had to become fully representative of modern life, one properly competitive with the exciting sensations emerging media such as cinema were eliciting.<sup>91</sup>

The predicament of needing to engage with the experiences of new media and to go beyond them was increasingly entering the heart of the Futurists’ vision of theatre. With Italy becoming a country of mass media, the experiences it afforded could not be ignored. Crucial to the Futurists’ foothold in public discourse was their rhetoric of a future that combined these new sensory and aesthetic experiences, even if it reincorporated them within a more traditional genre.<sup>92</sup> The movement turned current anxieties about cinema and radio into the necessity for competition between old and new (even if what resulted was something more symbiotic).<sup>93</sup> Futurist

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<sup>89</sup> ‘simile rinascita teatrale altro non è, se non un risultato della tendenza chiarificatrice che ormai invade quasi tutta l’Europa, reagendo con grande violenza contro gli estremi residui della enorme crisi romantica e contro i danni prodotti dal wagnerismo’; *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> ‘Credo quindi che la grande crisi post-romantica stia per finire’ and ‘dalla rinnovata passione cioè che anima presentemente i giovani musicisti nostri nei riguardi dell’arduo problema teatrale, sino a ieri considerato sia con pessimismo sia persino con disprezzo, ed oggi invece base di tutta la rinascita musicale nostra’; *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> As Casella put it, ‘la nuova musica italiana si troverà pronta a realizzare un teatro musicale veramente consono alla vita odierna’; *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> That new media were viewed (at least initially) with a sense of threat by many Futurist musicians and artists perhaps displays an inherent conservatism on their part, but it also shows how transformative such media were perceived as being.

<sup>93</sup> These anxieties were focussed on how new media would affect more traditional genres, and the ‘identity crisis’ that surrounded the ‘emergent media’. For more on the relationship between crisis and

preoccupation with speed and kinetic energy in music and theatre fed directly into this desire: 'We are convinced that mechanically, by force of brevity, we can achieve an entirely new theatre perfectly in tune with our swift and laconic Futurist sensibility. Our acts can also be moments [*atti—attimi*] only a few seconds long. With this essential and synthetic brevity the theatre can bear and even overcome competition from the *cinema*'.<sup>94</sup>

The *sintesi* that characterised the theatre of surprise were proposed to 'win the race with cinematography'.<sup>95</sup> Depero too had written a few years earlier of a scenography of movement and agility that matched the visual experience of the cinema. After asking 'Why does cinematography triumph?' despite still being 'a simple succession of black-and-white photographs', he provided the answer: 'It wins because it is fast, because it moves and transforms rapidly. Cinematography is varied and rich, improvised and surprising [...] It is necessary to add to the theatre everything that is suggested by cinematography'.<sup>96</sup> A 1924 special edition of *Noi*, dedicated to 'teatro e scena futurista', focussed on the threat posed by new media. More specifically, renewal of the theatre again required addressing the problems presented by the increasing dominance of the cinema.<sup>97</sup>

A new focus in the debate on cinema was emerging in the early 1920s. With the commercialisation of sound film, theorists' and artists' attention was drawn to the relationship between sound and the moving image. Among Futurists in particular, there was concern as to what the advent of such a medium would mean for more traditional genres such as music theatre. Casavola's music manifestos of 1924 investigated the nature of this relationship explicitly; he envisioned a music theatre that both addressed and moved beyond the specific problems posed by music accompanying film. For Casavola, the issue was that sound ended up subservient to the visual: what was seen on the screen immediately dominated and absorbed the viewer's attention. Theatrical renewal thus lay in making the music, if not superior,

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new media, see Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, eds., *New Media, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), xii. Rick Altman also talks about the identity crisis of media; see 'Crisis Historiography', in Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 15-26.  
<sup>94</sup> Marinetti, Settimelli and Corra, 'Il teatro sintetico futurista', reprinted in translation in Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*, 184.

<sup>95</sup> Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre, 1909-1944*, 80.

<sup>96</sup> Depero, 'Notes on the Theatre', in Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, trans. Victoria Nes Kirby (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), 209.

<sup>97</sup> For more on this, see Paolo Fossati, *La realtà attrezzata: scena e spettacolo dei futuristi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 173-74.



then at least equal to the visual aspect—a reordering of the sensorium that reflected the Futurist experience of modernity articulated elsewhere.<sup>98</sup>

This sensory reordering was a further area of Futurist preoccupation in 1924, one tied up with work on music and theatre, as well as the crisis of new media and their threat to older genres. The preoccupation was twofold: the senses were seen on the one hand to have been stultified by the weight of the past, while on the other to have been transformed by new mass entertainments.<sup>99</sup> This contradictory concern had instilled a perceived crisis of the senses that pervaded discussion that year. The need for the reinvigoration of modes of perception had long been at the centre of Futurist musical aesthetics: much of the work on noise was concerned with the reorientation required by modern sound culture, namely of war and the city. It was the particular qualities of such recent experience that had, after all, required a new musical art that both reflected and challenged these experiences; as Russolo had written:

Ma i nostri sensi, che soffrono nel ricevere un'emozione violenta a cui non siamo abituati, quasi non avvertono, d'altra parte, ciò che sono troppo abituati a sentire. Ed è per questo che, nella musica moderna, la ricerca di timbri e di coloriti orchestrali conseguiti mediante le più strane e artificiose dissonanze, è ormai diventata una preoccupazione dominante e costante.<sup>100</sup>

[But our senses, which suffer when they experience violent emotions to which we are not accustomed, almost seem, on the other hand, not to notice sensations with which they are too familiar. And that is why, in modern music, the search for timbres and orchestral colours, achieved through the strangest and most unnatural dissonances, has become a dominant and constant preoccupation.]

Again the procedure we have already encountered was taking place: contemporary crises about the stagnation of theatre, the threat posed by new media and the disorder of the senses were exploited by the Futurists and co-opted into their unyielding rhetoric.

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<sup>98</sup> Casavola, 'Le versioni scenico-plastiche della musica (Manifesto futurista)', in Marinetti, ed., *Il futurismo: rivista sintetica illustrata* 10 (1924), reprinted in Bianchi, *La musica futurista*, 239-40.

<sup>99</sup> For a theoretical and literary account of a technologically-mediated crisis of the senses, see Sara Danus, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>100</sup> Russolo, 'L'arte dei rumori: nuova voluttà acustica'.

## Advertising old Futurism

In every aspect of the Venetian performance and its surrounding discourse the Futurists exacerbated contemporary perceptions of crisis. By 1924, musical language, opera, theatre, emergent media, the senses, national identity, political ideology and society were enmeshed in debates about crisis and anxiety. If public discourse was characterised by this all-pervasive concern, it was partly a result of the broader cultural crisis of the postwar period: everything was perceived as heightened, with maximalist rhetoric evident in every sphere of discussion. Furthermore, this was intensified by the Venetian setting: a locale with its own reverberations of Futurism's troubled past and present, and an embodiment of the movement's mutual disdain for and attachment to the old.

Paradoxically, this culture not only enabled the Futurists' continuation, but also resulted in the movement's decline. To gain a foothold in discourse, they had exploited media outlets to a greater degree than ever before. The primary means employed—manifestos, periodicals and press releases—may have been rather old by 1924, but their exploitation to such an unprecedented degree made them the foremost media of the twentieth-century avant-garde. One contemporary critic had claimed that it was this 'mania for advertising' that had enabled Futurism to survive for fifteen years.<sup>101</sup> But if the performances were preceded by huge advertising campaigns—what historian Giovanni Antonucci calls 'exaggerated marketing hype'—that extolled their futurology and renewal from cultural crisis, when such events finally came to pass they were, perhaps inevitably, a disappointment.<sup>102</sup>

The result was an increasing discrepancy between theory and practice—between, if you will, text and act. If the performances could no longer support the weight of surrounding media hype, a deeper gap was opening up between the uncompromising vision stated in the advertising and the increasingly old spectacle happening on stage. Such events became 'artworlds' in the fullest sense: collaborative exercises that extended even to audience reaction, with the noted deficiencies of what happened onstage offset by theoretical foreshadowing devised to ally foreseen

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<sup>101</sup> 'mania di réclame'; Romagnoli, 'In hilaritate tristis (11 January 1924)', in *In platea: critiche drammatiche dell'anno 1923* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1924); reprinted in *Sipario* 2/2 (1967), 14.

<sup>102</sup> Giovanni Antonucci, *Lo spettacolo futurista in Italia* (Rome: Nuova Universale Studium, 1974), 67.

concerns.<sup>103</sup> For if the Futurists still saw themselves as inhabiting a phase of transition toward the future, contemporary critics were surprised by how reliant they were on the past. From the use of theatre and ballet, to the concepts of *la musica dell'avvenire* and the total work of art, every aspect of the performance had its resonant heritage.<sup>104</sup> Even the movement's continual effacement and rewriting of the past could not escape connections to historical precedents.

Furthermore, Futurism itself was increasingly seen as old and irrelevant. As contemporary critic Marco Praga claimed:

Sapevo, andandoci, che cosa, press'a poco, ci avrei veduto ed ascoltato; perché, se in vent'anni, non si è diffusa la comprensione nel pubblico e non si è accresciuto il favor popolare pure la produzione futurista non si è modificata, né ha trovato manifestazioni nuove o più significative o più espressive. Futurista sì, ma statica anzichè.<sup>105</sup>

[I knew, going there, more or less what I was to see and hear; for if in twenty years the audience's understanding has not enlarged and popular favour has not increased—the Futurist production has still not changed nor has it found new events that are more meaningful or more expressive. Futurist, yes, but fundamentally static.]

This led Praga to critique the individual aspects of the performance: 'The music of today is discordant notes and dissonances, the screeching and humming that made an impression on us some ten years ago; the paintings are always blue diamonds and green triangles, red pentagons and yellow circles, that we have long admired; and the synthetic dramas are pretty much [...] the ones we already acclaimed from the outset'.<sup>106</sup> As Russolo foretold, what had at first surprised quickly became

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<sup>103</sup> The notion of 'artworlds' here comes from Arthur Danto's idea of the 'atmosphere of art theory'; see Danto, 'The Artworld', *The Journal of Philosophy* 61/19 (October 1964), 571-84. For Howard Becker's 'network of people' involved, see Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008 [1982]).

<sup>104</sup> Antonucci suggests that such a reliance on the past might have been a way of trying to forge a relationship with the masses (however ambivalent that relationship might be): 'Il teatro futurista, a differenza di quello dada e surrealista, agisce sui palcoscenici tradizionali, utilizza interpreti popolari proprio nel repertorio da esso contestato' (The Futurist theatre, different to that of the Dadaists and Surrealists, was acted out on traditional stages, using popular actors from the very repertoire it contested); *Lo spettacolo futurista in Italia*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Marco Praga, 'Gli ultimi capolavori futuristi (29 January 1923)', in Praga, *Cronache teatrali 1924* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1925); reprinted in Bartolucci, 'I futuristi secondo la critica', 20.

<sup>106</sup> 'Le musiche di oggi sono le stonature e le dissonanze, gli stridori e i mugolì che ci impressionarono or fanno dieci anni; le pitture sono sempre le losanghe azzurre e i triangoli verdi i

convention.<sup>107</sup> Other critics and artists were also declaring Futurism moribund by the mid-1920s. The public could still react violently primarily because of verbal provocation and heightened expectation generated by the Futurists' manipulation of the press.

The movement's method of negotiating cultural crisis entailed a disavowal of all they were most reliant on. The heightened degree of contemporary anxiety and explosion of press networks called for a more extreme rhetoric and its unprecedented dissemination. At the same time, however, Futurist artistic practice was failing to evolve and adapt. Their notion of *la musica dell'avvenire* was undone by the movement's reinvention as a media enterprise and the exploitation of the culture of crisis. If this culture prompted the Futurists' intense preoccupation with everything they were trying to disavow, that preoccupation in turn showed the movement to be part of the very tendency it was trying to critique.<sup>108</sup>

The performance at the Goldoni thus presents a microcosm of the predicament of this moment in Futurism's history. The provocation between the movement and the audience may have become a repetitive and increasingly predictable event, but it also played out deeper contemporary tensions. The event challenged conceptual divides between older genres and mass media, technology and aesthetics, while simultaneously and paradoxically exposing these as the contradictions at the heart of the movement. These ambivalences and contradictions were heightened by the Venetian locale: a city where preoccupation with the future could never be performed at the expense of the past, a museum of Italy's heritage as well as a contested space for modernist display, Venice was itself a catalyst for the complex cultural negotiations of the postwar period. In a time when past and future were increasingly seen as irreconcilable, when renewal from cultural crisis meant disavowal

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pentagoni rossi e i cerchi gialli che ammiriamo da gran tempo: e i drammi sintetici, suppergiù [...] sono quelli che abbiamo già applauditi sin dagli esordi'; *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Peter Bürger also points out that the avant-garde's emphasis on shock entails a short-lived efficacy: 'Nothing loses its effectiveness more quickly than shock; by its very nature, it is a unique experience. As a result of repetition, it changes fundamentally: there is such a thing as expected shock'. He notes that 'expected shock' is often generated by the press. See Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 [1974]), 81. Furthermore, the Futurists' focus on the aesthetic, as well as ageing and forming convention, signified its failure to unite the art and life praxis—Bürger's key critique of the avant-garde.

<sup>108</sup> Calinescu also suggests that this aspect of avant-garde practice resulted in their undoing: 'both modernity and the avant-garde have displayed an extraordinary imagination of crisis; and they have jointly succeeded in creating a complex, often ironic and self-ironic sensitivity for crisis, which seems to be both their ultimate achievement and their nemesis'; Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 147.

of the old in favour of the new, Venice afforded an apposite platform for Futurism's inherent contradictions: above all, of forging a path to *la musica dell'avvenire* while betraying a love of the old.

# Chapter One

## Noisy legacies

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of Il Nuovo Teatro Futurista in Venice in 1924 serves as an apt starting point for this thesis. The event presents in microcosm the various contradictions and ambivalences that continued to play out in the city's musical culture into the mid-century and beyond: Venice as a site for display and for confrontation; an aesthetic of futurology reliant on the past; a moment emergent from—but not entirely responsive to—recent war. Above all, however, this Futurist occasion suggests that the various discourses and practices we will encounter in the 1950s had a much longer genealogy. In starting from such a case study, I imply no causality or teleology from the interwar to the postwar period; rather I intimate that such ideas were not entirely new in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Two of the questions I seek to address in this thesis are: first, why did certain discourses resurface at particular moments in the century; and, second, why did they find a particular resonance in Venice. I want to establish that these moments of resurgence in musical life were often based on avant-garde and theatrical activity, an observation that might jar with our assumptions of Venice at mid-century as an amphibious tourist museum. In the case studies that follow, I seek to excavate the intricate cultural politics that underpinned these aesthetic choices, and the reverberations their performances caused. Underneath seemingly conservative Venetian slogans about the city's built environment, such as *dov'era, com'era* (where it was, as it was), and a public rhetoric of preservation, conservation and museology, there was a renewed vigour in musical life—one made all the more surprising by its being ensconced in a lugubrious rhetoric of crisis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997 [1972]), 11.

<sup>2</sup> This Venetian saying has long been applied to restoration work in the city; for example, when the Campanile in Piazza San Marco collapsed in 1902, it was rebuilt according to how it was before. The phrase was also applied to the Teatro La Fenice, built in 1790-92, after the original Teatro San

To reconstruct the 1924 Futurist moment, however, involves stepping beyond the movement's own perspective on Venice and the networks of people involved in regional production; it also involves a consideration of both larger national cultural trends of which the Futurists formed a part, and of contemporary European avant-gardes. But the important point here is the perspective of the local. This is not to imply that there was anything inherently local in the events under scrutiny here; rather that the city—when viewed as a stage for such activity—brings to the fore and refracts previously overlooked characteristics, ones that often found their place in local discourse. Futurism *in Venice*, rather than *Venetian* Futurism. Such an approach also seeks to provincialise Italian modernism, the avant-garde and opera culture, taking it away from the usual urban centres (Milan and Turin) and more general theoretical accounts.<sup>3</sup>

I want to suggest that the very contradictions and oppositions at the heart of the Futurist movement provide a fruitful framework for what follows. These, I will argue, were also defining features of musical and civic life under the Fascist regime, and then of both Venice and opera discourse by the 1950s. Taken together, they expose a particular *modernità* in the first half of the twentieth century, a modernity defined by the sublimation of the very contradictions it comprised. In other words, an archaeology of the particular moments in this thesis will reveal an idea of the modern premised on indebtedness to older cultural forms and practices—something inherent, above all, in Venice's city-fabric.<sup>4</sup>

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Benedetto was destroyed by fire. It was again rebuilt in 1837 after a fire in 1836, and finally in 2001 after a fire in 1996. Each time the theatre was reconstructed according to the plans of the previous building.

<sup>3</sup> An important precursor in modernism and avant-garde studies is Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); on opera and music culture, see Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009) and Ben Earle, *Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> 'Archaeology' will be a central mode of enquiry in what follows: first in the investigation of discourse, in line with Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002 [1969]). Second, in a more recent reincarnation of the term's theoretical application in part derived from Foucault: 'media archaeology', a field that seeks to uncover historical uses of often forgotten media. For more on this, see Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) and Parikka and Erkki Huhtamo, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

## Fascism

One important context that frames the following chapters is, of course, Fascist culture.<sup>5</sup> The avant-gardism of the earlier part of the century fed directly into the cultural politics of the regime. While a detailed account of Fascist culture is beyond the remit of this Chapter, there are several aspects worth highlighting here. First, political and aesthetic oscillations and contradictions meant that Fascism lacked a stable core: from staunch anti-clericalism to the promotion of Roman Catholicism; from cultural modernism to reactionary conservatism; from Mussolini's mocking of anti-Semitism to the adoption of Nazi-style racial ideology. Yet aspects of the regime remained relatively constant: antiparliamentarianism; heightened nationalism and autarchy; a totalitarian conception of the state; the collective over the individual; emphasis on discipline, hierarchy and authority—all expressed in a populist rhetoric; history as national rather than class conflict; the cult of youth; and an anti-capitalism built on idiosyncratic industrialisation, modernisation and bureaucratisation. Such idiosyncrasy—a determining feature of the regime also evident in the cultural sphere—was in part because Fascist society was governed by syndicates, each with its own agenda and ideological values. Unlike other forms of totalitarianism, the regime tried to co-opt rather than dictate individual endeavours. This attracted many intellectuals and artists to the party, keeping its cultural policy (to the extent there was enough coherence for one) relatively pluralist. The regime was, as a result, notably more pro-modernist and avant-gardist than Nazi Germany.

Second, Fascism had a particular relationship to the idea of crisis. As the Prologue demonstrated, a rhetoric of crisis pervaded daily life and culture in the interwar period, even nestling in Fascism's own identity. Both Fascism's originary moment and its demise was premised on an understanding of the time as one of crisis. The regime's first insurgence, the march on Rome, was asserted as an imposition of, and consequently a taking charge within, a state of emergency.<sup>6</sup> Whereas crisis was seen to make Fascism possible, by the Armistice of Cassibile, publicly released on 8

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<sup>5</sup> I capitalise Fascism here to denote that I am referring to the Partito Nazionale Fascista, and not fascism as a more general form of totalitarian politics (of which Nazism is another variant). The Italian Fascists came to power on 29 October 1922, but did not become a dictatorship until 1925.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the political significance of a state of emergency, see Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).



September 1943, it rendered the regime unviable.<sup>7</sup> Perceived as the collapse of the nation, the armistice immediately raised questions over Italy's future and identity. The country had suffered greatly during the war, enduring devastating military defeats, racial persecution, huge losses in the African colonies and in Russia, and humiliating defeat and occupation on its home soil. The period 1943–45 was one of almost civil war, with Allied occupation in the South and German occupation in the North, as well as growing Resistance movements in much of the country and a puppet Fascist regime at Salò led by a weakened Mussolini. In the aftermath the monarchy collapsed and the country became a republic; many of its leaders fled and the army was dispersed.

The significance of crisis for the regime's self-identity has also been a feature of analyses: historian Walter Adamson has interpreted Fascist culture as a response to a crisis of modernity, while others such as the historian Zeev Sternhell have understood the regime's revolutionary impetus as due to a crisis both of Marxism and liberalism. These analyses underpin a longstanding debate on Fascism: about whether it had its own ideology (according to Sternhell), or was rather premised on a 'sacralisation' or 'aestheticisation' of politics (according to Adamson and others).<sup>8</sup> With the benefit of historical distance it is perhaps now possible to move beyond these entrenched divisions, and instead recognise Fascism's rhetorical self-creation, as well as the values and interpellations that fuelled its discourse.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Having entered the war in June 1940, by September 1943 Italy was forced to surrender, following widespread defeat of its armed forces and growing dissatisfaction with the regime. For more on the Armistice, see Elena Aga-Rossi, *A Nation Collapses: The Italian Surrender of September 1943*, trans. Harvey Ferguson II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Fascism as political religion relies on a reading of Nietzsche rather than of Marx; for examples of this approach, see Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1993); George Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations', *Journal of Contemporary History* 31/2 (1996), 245–52; and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For examples of Fascism as ideology, see Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Left nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Sternhell's more recent 'Fascism: Reflections on the Fate of Ideas in Twentieth-Century History', in Michael Freeden, ed., *Reassessing Political Ideologies: The Durability of Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2001), 92–115. For an overview of the debate, see Antonio Costa Pinto, 'Fascist Ideology Revisited: Zeev Sternhell and His Critics', *European History Quarterly* 16/4 (1986), 465–83, and Robert Wohl, 'French Fascism, Both Right and Left: Reflections on the Sternhell Controversy', *Journal of Modern History* 63/1 (1991), 91–98.

<sup>9</sup> Such interpellations can be premised on an inconsistent ideology—as something more unconscious, phantasmatic and contradictory. For a theorisation of ideology as an imaginary way in which people relate to the real conditions of existence, see Ernesto Laclau, 'Fascism and Ideology', in *Politics and*

These two features of Fascist political and cultural discourse—the emphasis on contradiction and ambivalence, and the pervasive sense of crisis—also played out in the musical landscape. The situation was markedly different from that in Nazi Germany: more aesthetically plural in what it promoted and (at least until the later 1930s) not strongly governed by racial laws.<sup>10</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, for example, was widely performed in Italy until 1938, and Alban Berg was heard as late as 1942. Again, while an overview of musical culture under the regime is a subject for another study, several points are worth stressing here. As within other cultural spheres, musical life was dominated by the regime’s corporate structures: patronage, festivals and competitions dictated the musical year and enmeshed musicians in the Fascist fold.<sup>11</sup> A survey of these reveals a relatively open sponsorship of diverse and eclectic practices.

Contemporary music was given prominence, with the Mostra del Novecento Musicale Italiano held in Bologna from 31 March to 12 April 1927, and the Mostre Nazionali of contemporary music in Rome, first held in May 1930.<sup>12</sup> The Venice Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea was inaugurated in 1930 and was immediately established as a place for both old and new, with an emphasis on instrumental rather than theatrical music. Such festivals and exhibitions were central to Fascist self-representation, allowing possibilities for historiographical rewriting and expropriation.<sup>13</sup>

Debates raged in response to these occasions over the direction that musical culture under the regime should take. Discussion was polarised between pro-modernists, such as the composers Alfredo Casella, Gian Francesco Malipiero and

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*Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 2011 [1977]), 81-142.

Barbara Spackman also calls for a move beyond the old debate in *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), x.

<sup>10</sup> Roberto Illiano, ed., *Italian Music During the Fascist Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004) and Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987) provide surveys of the period. Fiamma Nicolodi, *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista* (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1984), remains an important source of information. For a significant new account of the period, see Earle, *Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy*.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed examination of Fascist power structures of patronage (although focussed on the visual arts rather than music), see Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> While there is some evidence of music being performed at Fascist exhibitions, such occasions seem predominantly to have consisted of renditions of the Fascist hymn *La giovinezza* by re-recorded choruses: for example, at the 1932 Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista. For more on this, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, ‘Fascism’s Museum in Motion’, *Journal of Architectural Education* 45/2 (February 1992), 87-97.

<sup>13</sup> Schnapp, op. cit., interprets the exhibitions as modernist politics of spectacle, premised on contradictory aesthetics: past and future, traditionalist and modernist, conservative and revolutionary, individualist and corporate consumerist.

Luigi Dallapiccola, and administrators and politicians Mario Labroca, Giuseppe Bottai and Nicola de Pirro; and anti-modernists, such as the politician Roberto Farinacci and composers Ildebrando Pizzetti and Ottorino Respighi. Initiatives such as the Società Italiana di Musica Moderna were founded in 1917 by Casella, Malipiero and Gabriele D'Annunzio to further modernist interests; Casella later abandoned this to form the Corporazione delle Nuove Musiche, which had similar aims, in 1923. Conversely, in December 1932 the anti-modernist *Manifesto dei dieci* was published in the *Corriere della sera* and *La stampa*. Written by Alceo Toni, a music critic for the Fascist *Il popolo d'Italia*, and including Respighi and Pizzetti among its signatories, it was a thinly-veiled attack on figures such as Casella and Malipiero, which claimed that their espousal of musical modernism was inherently internationalist and anti-Italian.<sup>14</sup> While such disputes took place over the aesthetics of modernism, equal importance was being given to the recovery of music from the nation's past. The music of composers such as Monteverdi and Vivaldi was enjoying revival, often as the result of scholarly and philological work led by Venetian figures (especially Malipiero) and centred on Venetian archives.<sup>15</sup> Fascist music culture was thus characterised by the simultaneous emphasis on modernism and revivalism; eclecticism and hybridity were to become its distinctive traits.

The situation within operatic culture remained complicated.<sup>16</sup> Although Mussolini seemed relatively uninterested in opera compared to other musical genres (and to film), much public discourse was devoted to the need for opera renewal.<sup>17</sup> Casella led such calls, drawing a connection between a new aesthetics of operatic

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<sup>14</sup> But as if to reinforce the pluralist nature of Fascist cultural policy, Mussolini personally wrote to Casella and Malipiero after the manifesto's publication, assuring them that its sentiments did not come from higher office.

<sup>15</sup> For example, much scholarly work was undertaken on the huge array of sources at Venice's Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. For more on these revivals, see Ivano Di Lillo, 'The Monteverdi Revival', in 'Opera and Nationalism in Fascist Italy' (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Cambridge, 2012), 23-57; Andrew Dell'Antonio, 'Il divino Claudio: Monteverdi and Lyric Nostalgia in Fascist Italy', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8/3 (1996), 271-84; Iain Fenlon, 'Malipiero, Monteverdi, Mussolini, and Musicology', in Alison Latham, ed., *Sing, Ariel. Essays and Thoughts for Alexander Goehr's Seventieth Birthday* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 241-55; and Catherine Paul, 'Ezra Pound, Alfredo Casella, and the Fascist Cultural Nationalism of the Vivaldi Revival', in Massimo Bacigalupo and William Pratt, eds., *Ezra Pound, Language and Persona* (Genoa: Università degli Studi di Genoa, 2008), 91-112.

<sup>16</sup> For more on opera under Fascism, see Di Lillo, 'Opera and Nationalism in Fascist Italy'.

<sup>17</sup> Attention during this time was given perhaps first and foremost to instrumental music: the musicologist Fausto Torrefranca, together with Mussolini and the *generazione dell'Ottanta* (a term coined by Massimo Mila to denote the early modernist composers born around 1880) promoted a turn to such music as a renewal of a more distant part of their heritage, and condemned the nation's reliance on opera.

spectacle and Fascist ideology. With the death of Puccini in 1924, opera was perceived to have entered its death throes. The importance of the past lingered in renewal: new opera was to be a synthesis of tradition and modernity, capable of taking its place in the canon beside long-established classics.<sup>18</sup> This contradiction at the heart of Fascist music culture—of the importance of Italian heritage, but also of the need for cultural modernisation—is something we will repeatedly encounter in the 1950s.

Fascism was quick to arrive in Venice, the city's *fascio di combattimento* only the second to be formed in the country, in April 1919.<sup>19</sup> The Venetian *biennio rosso* (1919-20) was characterised by a rapid shift from socialism to Fascism in many of the city's institutions. Newspapers such as *La gazzetta di Venezia* (traditionally the paper of the Venetian aristocracy and middle classes) and *Il gazzettino* (which had a broader readership) both came out in support of the party.<sup>20</sup> The Fascist preoccupation with the city was divided: on the one hand, governed by the requirements of the regime; and on the other with the needs of tourism. The grand tour of the previous century had been replaced by a yearly tourist season. The businessman and politician Count Giuseppe Volpi's Compagnia Italiana Grandi Alberghi (CIGA), together with the tourist office, organised the city's social life in accordance with the growing influx of wealthy visitors.

The Fascists made Venice a stage for the nation's culture, revitalising the Biennale. The festival had begun in 1895, and was initially run by the Comune di Venezia. In subsuming the Biennale under state ownership in 1930—overseen by an Ente autonomo—the Fascists intended to have a direct role in its running, making the festival a statement of the nation's high culture on display for the rest of the world.<sup>21</sup> The Biennale was run by a fine arts syndicate, with the explicit intention of providing a platform for both local and national endeavours in response to a provincialism they

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<sup>18</sup> Casella claimed that operas such as his *Il deserto tentato* (1937) provided an example of this; see Casella, 'Problemi e posizione attuale della musica italiana', *Le arti* 1/3 (1939), 256-62.

<sup>19</sup> For an account of the early years of Fascism in Venice, see Raffaele Vicentini, *Il movimento fascista veneto attraverso il diario di uno squadrista* (Venice: Stamperia Zanetti, 1935).

<sup>20</sup> For more on *Il gazzettino*, a paper that will be important in this thesis, see Maurizio De Marco, *Gazzettino. Storia di un quotidiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> Conversely, Rome was a centre for the domestic fine arts. Stone notes that the huge sums spent and attention given to the Venice Biennale between 1928 and 1942 were intended to make it 'the primary site of evolving Fascist arts patronage strategies'; Stone, *The Patron State*, 60. The Biennale had initially been run by the mayor of Venice. This changed in 1920, and a separate president was put in charge. The first to head it was Giovanni Bordiga, with Vittorio Pica as secretary general. This led to the first displays of avant-garde art, as Pica had long been interested in the Impressionists.

saw as having been prevalent under Giolittian liberalism. In addition, in an attempt to counter perceptions of Venice as backward-looking and reliant on its past (something perceived to be a problem for Italy more generally), the syndicate directly encouraged the display of avant-garde works. Having founded the music festival in 1930, they established the Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica in 1932.

The Fascists' aesthetic vision for the Biennale is embodied in the changes made to the architectural front-piece of the main pavilion: having initially been built in a neoclassical style, with fake Roman columns and ornate engravings, in 1932 it was replaced by a minimalist modernism, designed by Giulio Torres (see Figure 1). The mounted slogan 'Pro arte' was replaced simply by 'Italia', and the winged lion of St Mark—the symbol of Venice—now stood alongside the Fascist emblem of the imperial eagle holding a *fascio littorio*.

The music festival was thus run in conjunction with the Biennale, presided over by the composer, conductor and ardent Fascist Adriano Lualdi, and under the aegis of the regime. Lualdi wrote in the festival's opening programme that despite its international character, it remained an unadulterated Italian and Fascist institution.<sup>22</sup> Casella was appointed vice-president, and Labroca and Malipiero were on the executive committee. Thus from the start there were management divisions between the aesthetically conservative and the modernists. This led to a degree of eclecticism in the festival's programming, with a mix of old and new, dodecaphony and neoclassicism, instrumental works and opera. While some events took place outdoors and in smaller theatres, many occurred at the city's main opera house, the Teatro La Fenice. The composer and conductor Goffredo Petrassi was appointed General Director of the theatre from 1937 to 1940. In an interview with Harvey Sachs, he noted that the arts had enjoyed relative freedom up until the mid-1930s, when increased Fascist autarchy and pressure from Germany led to tighter control.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 'in onta al loro carattere e al loro ufficio internazionale, in onta alla larga ospitalità che offrono all'arte e agli artisti stranieri, sono una istituzione prettamente italiana e prettamente fascista'; cited in Nicolodi, 'Su alcuni aspetti dei festivals tra le due guerre', in Nicolodi, ed., *Musica italiana del primo novecento—'La generazione dell'ottanta'—Atti del convegno, Firenze 9-10-11 maggio 1980* (Florence: Olschki, 1981), 141-203, here 162.

<sup>23</sup> Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy*, 137.

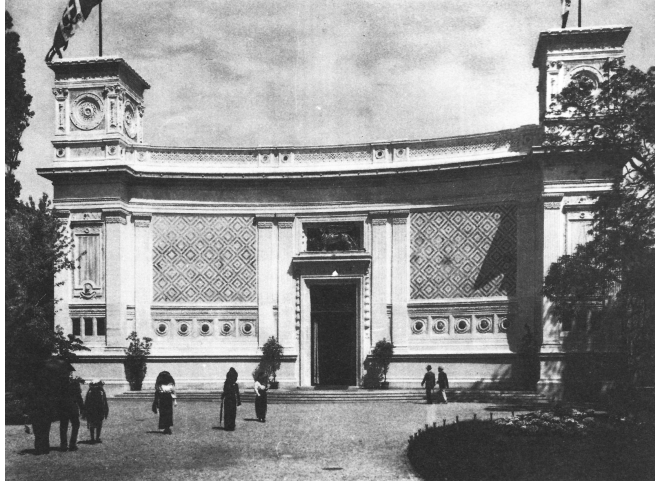


Figure 1: (a) Facade of the Venice Biennale Italia pavilion (1914).



Figure 1: (b) The new facade for the Italia pavilion by Giulio Torres (1932).

These phases of supervision correspond with historian Marla Susan Stone's analysis of three periods of Fascist state patronage, each echoing the regime's broader transformations from 'consolidation to stabilization to war'.<sup>24</sup> According to her account, the first phase of the Fascist party (1925-30) was characterised by an aesthetic pluralism (as long as work was not explicitly anti-Fascist). Focus during this time was instead geared to centralisation and bureaucratisation, with high culture being particularly supported as a way of gaining legitimacy for the regime. Once this was complete, the majority of artistic institutions (including the Biennale) were subsumed into the government-controlled corporate model (1931-36). Then the

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<sup>24</sup> Stone, *The Patron State*, 6.

question could be asked what Fascist art might look like; through arts policy, patronage and experimentation, the regime began to take control of artistic and cultural production. The final phase (1937–43) witnessed the growing hostility between the entrenched camps that had previously co-existed to form the pluralist milieu. Owing to the increasing desperation of the regime, it became more dictatorial in its forms of patronage, yielding to more National Socialist models of organisation.

The relative pluralism of cultural life under much of the regime's rule made its legacy all the more complicated. If the Fascists were interested in cultural recuperation, as well as openly supporting modernist activity (even claiming origins in the cultural avant-garde), then that made the issue of how to be aesthetically anti-Fascist only more problematic. Following the collapse of the regime, this question hovered, made all the more complex by the fact that the system of state patronage had involved vast numbers of musicians and other cultural figures: a large degree of continuity seemed inevitable. These are questions and issues the present thesis will also seek to explore. I want to reframe claims made against Italy under Fascist rule as musically uninteresting, and instead investigate how this plurality and continuity made the regime's aftermath all the more fascinating.<sup>25</sup>

This situation also made the Italian predicament different from that of postwar Germany, although the two have often been compared.<sup>26</sup> For the new generation of postwar Italian composers, dodecaphony was not enough in itself to be anti-Fascist, and the move to electroacoustic means for their own sake was seen as a retreat from social responsibility. Considered in this way, the combination of a modernist musical language and an explicitly (far Left) political message—such as in the music of Luigi Nono—does not seem so strange. This also perhaps gives further

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<sup>25</sup> This claim, for example, is evident in Richard Taruskin's response to Sachs's *Music in Fascist Italy*: 'while Italy in the twentieth century is obviously a good place to observe fascism, Italy in the twentieth century is rather a poor place to observe music'; Taruskin, 'The Dark Side of the Moon', review of Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy*, originally in *New Republic* (5 September 1988), reprinted in Taruskin, *The Danger of Music: And Other Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 202–16, here 205.

<sup>26</sup> Although the German situation was more complicated than histories have tended to suggest, both with regard to musical life under the dictatorship and under the processes of denazification that followed, that does not change the fact that Nazi rhetoric was on the whole anti-modernist and anti-avant-gardist, while Fascist rhetoric originated in a discourse of futurism, modernism and modernity. For more on the situation in Nazi Germany, see the recent overview in Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia, eds., *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007). Revisionist perspectives are discussed in Taruskin, 'Music and Totalitarian Society', in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 743–96.

reason for the hostile relations that arose between Italian and German composers at the postwar music courses at Darmstadt, why figures such as Nono were perceived as inhabiting a more idiosyncratic position in relation to European modernism and why Hans Werner Henze spent most of his career in Italy.<sup>27</sup>

## Venice

The second major context for this thesis is Venice itself. The twentieth century witnessed a growing recognition of the need for the city's preservation. There had long been awareness of its physical and geopolitical decline: Goethe had written in a diary entry from 1786 of the lagoons that are 'gradually silting up and unhealthy miasmas hovering over their marshes, their trade may be declining, their political power dwindling'.<sup>28</sup> By the early years of the twentieth century the city was undergoing unprecedented physical assault. *Acque alte* were occurring ever more frequently, and increased subsidence was undermining the structures of some of the city's most important buildings. Restoration and renewal were seen as concomitant with the birth of mass tourism. Visitors started to take the place of citizens: the first half of the century witnessed the highpoint of the city's modern population, with a recorded 163,559 in the *città storica* in 1930, followed by a period of sharp decline.<sup>29</sup>

The history of the Venetian twentieth century is often seen as a transformation from a working city to a city-museum. But there was more diverse activity taking place than this suggests. Renewed discussion focussed on the future of its industry, for example, industry that was directly impacting the city's urban and physical geography. The Futurist calls for the filling in of canals and a newly industrial Venice had actually been debated by Venetians themselves since the beginning of the century. Such discussion only intensified after the First World War, an event that had a devastating

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed Nono's parting speech to Darmstadt, 'Presenza storica nella musica d'oggi' (1959), was premised on what he saw as certain German composers' abdication of historical responsibility in their move to highly abstract musical language. For a translation of the speech, see Nono, 'Historical Presence in Music Today', in Brian Simms, ed. and trans., *Composers on Modern Musical Culture: An Anthology of Readings on Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1999), 168-74. His critique was directed, above all, at Karlheinz Stockhausen. For more on Nono's speech, see Chapter Five. Growing hostility at the courses was also the result of personality clashes; for more on this, see Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt: Nono, Stockhausen, Cage and Boulez* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786-1788*, trans. W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (London: Penguin, 1982 [1962]), 78.

<sup>29</sup> The population of Venice has halved since 1951. Further statistics are provided in Emilio Franzina, ed., *Venezia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1986), 296.



impact on both the Venetian economy and the city itself, which was physically damaged by aerial bombardment. The politician and military figure Piero Foscari, followed by Volpi and the politician Count Vittorio Cini (and the rest of the *gruppo veneziano*) all called for renewed industry and commerce to rejuvenate the city.<sup>30</sup>

Chemical and metallurgic plants were built on the mainland at Porto Marghera from 1917; these increased production dramatically in the 1920s and 30s. Such industrial activity directly contradicted avant-garde criticisms of the city's failure to modernise.<sup>31</sup> The Fascists did much to continue this work: in 1933 the construction of a road bridge that followed the route of the rail bridge (built in 1846) between Venice and the mainland was finally completed (opened by Mussolini) after years of heated debate.<sup>32</sup> Some canals were actually filled in—just as the Futurists had prophesied—so that they could be used as roads. A need for the city's preservation thus co-existed with a desire not to be shackled to its heritage: a futurist vision while conserving what Henry James called 'the aesthetic presence of the past' that haunted Venice.<sup>33</sup>

However, renewed industry on the Mestre did little to alleviate poverty in the city.<sup>34</sup> Boat repairs and construction at the Arsenale were coming to an end, and artisanal crafts such as glass and lace production steadily diminished as the century progressed.<sup>35</sup> The new factories at Porto Marghera predominantly employed peasants from the rural mainland, who were seen as better adapted for physical labour than Venetians from the *centro storico*.<sup>36</sup> The rise in new industry on the Mestre was thus concomitant with a steady increase in unemployment in the Venetian archipelago. The situation was no better during the Second World War, even though the city was protected from aerial bombardment by an unspoken agreement among the powers.

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<sup>30</sup> The *gruppo veneziano* comprised local business leaders and industrialists interested in the economic development of the city; for more on the group, see Maurizio Reberschak, 'Gli uomini capitali: il "gruppo veneziano" (Volpi, Cini e gli altri)', in Mario Isnenghi and Stuart Woolf, eds., *Storia di Venezia: l'ottocento e il novecento*, vol. 2 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2002), 1255-1311.

<sup>31</sup> Kate Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929-40* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 22.

<sup>32</sup> For discussion of the ongoing exchanges between the *pontisti* and the *anti-pontisti*, see Margaret Plant, *Venice: Fragile City, 1797-1997* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 282-83.

<sup>33</sup> Henry James, *Letters from the Palazzo Barbaro*, ed. Rosella Mamoli Zorzi (London: Pushkin, 1998), 68.

<sup>34</sup> The situation was so dire by the early part of the century that the city had the highest suicide rates in Italy; see Luigi Picchini, *Tentati suicidi e suicidi con particolare riguardo alla città di Venezia* (Venice: Grafiche Sorteri, 1933).

<sup>35</sup> This is not to suggest that Venice was entirely devoid of industry in the first half of the century: there was still operational dockland on the outskirts of the island and factories on the Giudecca.

<sup>36</sup> This is discussed further in Ferris, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929-40*, 24-26.

With the economic and physical impact of the two wars, as well as ongoing decline and hardship, tourism became an ever more important source of income for the city, greatly assisting postwar restoration.<sup>37</sup> Town planning meant that poverty was pushed into particular districts on the outskirts of the *centro storico*, and many moved to new, more sanitary housing on the mainland.<sup>38</sup> There were thus two fundamental visions of Venice in the first half of the century: on the one hand, a hub for tourism and the arts—premised on the preservation of the city’s heritage; on the other, a site for industry and technological development, based on the importance of the future at the expense of the past.<sup>39</sup> These divided visions even came to inhabit different geographical spaces: the centre of Venice, particularly the area around the Rialto, became the principal tourist site; while industry was moved to outlying regions and the mainland coast.<sup>40</sup>

Such local history will be an important backdrop for the musical events we are about to encounter. But in addition I want to establish the city as a more imaginary milieu, one formed through centuries of art, music and literature as both a cultural platform and a discursive space. Reincarnation and renewal of tropes of the museographic and spectacular, of cultural and technological modernisation in response to the century’s impact on Venice, simmer beneath the chapters that follow. I want to emphasise

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, tourism was to become a driving factor in its modern urban economy; Andreas Huyssen makes a similar point (although applied to the years around the turn of the twenty-first century) when he suggests that ‘In recent decades some classical modernist cities in Europe have taken on a veneer of museal cities in which preservation reigns supreme. Clearly, the modernist city in the West has become historical, but one should not underestimate the importance of the museal dimension for urban economies and urban life’; Huyssen, ed., *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 9. For overviews of debates on tourism in Venice, see R.J.B. Bosworth, ‘Venice between Fascism and International Tourism, 1911–45’, *Modern Italy* 4/1 (1999), 5–23 and Stefania Longo, ‘Culture, Tourism and Fascism in Venice, 1919–1945’ (Ph.D. dissertation: University of London, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> These concerns over urban development continued into the 1950s. The decade was framed by a series of architectural studies and urban histories: Egle Renata Trincanato, *Venezia minore* (Milan: Esperia, 1948) and Saverio Muratori, *Studi per un operante storia urbana di Venezia* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1960). There were calls, in particular, for investigations into how new housing stock and modern buildings could be built within the confines of the city; see, for example, Giuseppe Samonà, ‘Per un Piano Regolatore di Venezia’, *Urbanistica* 26 (1955), 71–80.

<sup>39</sup> These two visions are embodied by Giuseppe Volpi, who not only argued for the industrial growth of Venice as part of the *gruppo veneziano*, but who also championed Venetian culture in his leadership of CIGA and involvement in the running of the Biennale.

<sup>40</sup> The geographical divisions of Venice’s labour market are discussed in Deborah Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 274. There was also the conflict of industry undermining the very foundations of the city: the silting of the industrial plants causing subsidence in the lagoon, and the sulphurous fumes emitted corroding the buildings; see Milton Grundy, *Venice: An Anthology Guide* (London: Lund Humphries, 1976).

Venice's exceptionality and typicality: while it can be used as an exemplar of broader Italian and transnational phenomena, it also had a certain strangeness and idiosyncrasy that speaks to the particularity of mid-century discourses on opera crisis, modernism and mass media, resonances that may seem surprising at first glance.

In looking at musical culture in the decade or so after the Second World War, I want to stress Venice as a living and active place—to look beyond the cliché of its museum image and posit it as a place of revitalised cultural activity. The metaphor of the museum has a longer history in perceptions of the city: again it was James who wrote that 'The Venice of today is a vast museum where the little wicket that admits you is perpetually turning and creaking, and you march through the institution with a herd of fellow-gazers'.<sup>41</sup> But the city's antiquarianism and tourist economy became a breeding ground for a particular kind of *modernità*. In other words, Venice became a catalyst for more refractory and local incarnations: as a city that embodied modernism's ambivalences in its very fabric. By now long obsolete as a place of political authority, the city was coming alive as a site of avant-garde activity.

I also want to use perceptions of Venice as residing on the edge of twentieth-century processes of modernisation—its purposes now cultural heritage and display—as a way of entering this moment of opera history through the backdoor.<sup>42</sup> The history of the city just outlined is one of constant jarring and juxtaposition, between past and present, old and new: the Futurists calling for the city's embrace of the future at the expense of the past, while at the same time exhibiting a growing awareness of the need for its preservation; a city contained within older architectural forms, while using avant-garde and modernist activity as a vision for its future;<sup>43</sup> Venice as a tourist museum simultaneous with and dependent on an emergent site of cultural endeavour; the Fascists' celebration of the city as an emblem of *italianità* at the same time as it was becoming host to a revitalised internationalism.

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<sup>41</sup> James, *Italian Hours* (New York: Grove, 1909), 5.

<sup>42</sup> As historian Lucy Riall suggests: 'Historians have long recognized that the reactions of borderlands and peripheries to modernizing processes can tell us much about the shaping of nineteenth- and twentieth-century worlds'; Riall, *Under the Volcano: Revolution in a Sicilian Town* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xii. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy* and John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) have also done important work on the light that local perspectives can shed on national and transnational issues.

<sup>43</sup> The city's inevitable embodiment of the past is the reason that Jennifer Scappettone claims it is 'post-Romantic' rather than 'modernist'; Scappettone, 'Venice and the Digressive Invention of the Modern: Retrospection's Futurity' (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2005).

Thus while suggesting a certain *venezianità*—a particular *tinta* for mid-century modernism—I also want to propose Venice as a stage for the contradictions and transformations of 1950s cultural discourse. I use the term ‘modernism’ here to apply to cultural forms and discourse reacting to the processes of modernisation—as formed through the lens of a specific ideology critique.<sup>44</sup> My perspective is two-pronged: the way Venice was imagined by artists and cultural figures as a space for their art; but also the way opera and modernism were conceived by networks of artists either resident in or visiting the city. In this way I also want to see the configuration and conception of the city’s spaces as intimately tied up with its cultural politics: to see its discourse networks as constitutive.<sup>45</sup> Venice has never been entirely cosmopolitan, never entirely provincial: it has remained a local city, while simultaneously being an international stage. Indeed, the uneasy mix of locals and international jet-set at the festival events warns us not to assume that such occasions were in any sense a purely regional or national affair.

Such specificity also builds on the established discipline of Italian microhistory. Carlo Ginzburg, one of the movement’s figureheads, has long emphasised the importance of the case study as both typical and exceptional.<sup>46</sup> While microhistory’s focus on the local has obviously influenced the perspective of the present study, I am equally indebted to recent scholarship on the transnational. However, while narratives of globalisation have often tended to flatten space, to render it aspatial, I want to push the local back into relief here—to reinforce its multiplicities.<sup>47</sup> In the chapters that

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<sup>44</sup> For example, there are those who react against processes of modernisation (such as T.W. Adorno and Arnold Schoenberg), and those figures and movements who replicate its values (i.e. Futurism). Modernisation is understood here as processes that happen—to borrow a Marxist term—in the base (for example, processes of economic rationalisation such as industrialisation, secularisation and urbanisation). Modernity is used as a philosophical conception of the relationship between modernisation and modernism, which Fredric Jameson claims is a narrative beginning from the Enlightenment. Furthermore, narrative is a trope all about breaks, and so modernity asserts itself as a break. See Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002); and Jameson, ‘Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism’, *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8/1 (Spring 1975), 1-20. In Italian musical discourse by the mid-century, *modernità* was generally applied to situations corresponding to the use of modernism as here defined.

<sup>45</sup> The blurring of spatial and political imaginations of space in this way is discussed by the geographer Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 11. The idea of discourse networks is from Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermini: il cosmo di un mugnaio del ‘500* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Spatialising globalisation’ is also promoted by Massey, who argues that it ‘means recognising crucial characteristics of the spatial: its multiplicity, its openness, the fact that it is not reducible to a “surface”, its integral relation with temporality’; Massey, *For Space*, 88. In this way, she argues, we

follow, Venice will oscillate between foreground and background, but its role as an underlying stage for the events that unfold is constant. Looking at mid-century opera discourses of crisis, the museographic and the sepulchral can both be inflected and enhanced by looking within a city locale that was undergoing similar discussion. Furthermore, both were enjoying a fascinating and somewhat surprising resurgence at a moment when this more lugubrious rhetoric was perceived to be heightened.<sup>48</sup>

## **Festival moments**

The chapters that follow are each focussed on a particular event. Their diversity is deliberate: I want to suggest that both old and new works, by foreign and Italian composers, contributed to postwar musical discourse in equal measure. By situating Venice as a backdrop, I also want to position this music in a specific context. The works under scrutiny, when they have been studied at all, have tended to be viewed as part of composer-centric accounts, or as examples in more theoretical considerations (and thus often divorced from any sense of place) of modernism, neoclassicism, etc.<sup>49</sup> In other words, the musical works that form the topics of these chapters have yet to be looked at under the umbrella of a single study, as happening on the same stage, within the same decade and under the aegis of the same festival.

In arguing for a particular receptive atmosphere for the productions, one amplified and enhanced by the Venetian milieu, I thus seek to reinforce the importance of place and locality in twentieth-century music history. I want, in other words, to propose a specific musical chronotope of the 1950s, not in the Bakhtinian

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can also reconstruct the global from the local, thus sidestepping the sometimes dangerous homogenisation globalisation can create.

<sup>48</sup> Recourse to the sepulchral, tombs and crowds in reverential silence is also a feature of visitor writing on the city: again James, for example, wrote that ‘Venetian life, in the large old sense, has long since come to an end and the essential present character of the most melancholy of cities resides simply in its being the most beautiful of tombs [...] Nowhere else is the present so alien, so discontinuous, so like a crowd in a cemetery without garlands for the graves [...] The vast mausoleum has a turnstile at the door, and a functionary in a shabby uniform lets you in, as per tariff, to see how dead it is’; James, *Italian Hours*, 31-32. For James, tourism in Venice was a commoditisation of the city’s deadness.

<sup>49</sup> Composer-centric studies have long been a mainstay of writing on Igor Stravinsky and Nono, for example. Both have also tended to be looked at from the perspective of theories of mid-century modernism, accounts that have often tended to elide them with contemporary German composers in particular. Berio has perhaps fared somewhat better in this regard. There remains scant scholarship on Alberto Bruni Tedeschi and Gino Negri (see Chapter Four). The literature on Verdi is too vast to summarise here, but it is perhaps worth mentioning the paucity of studies on the twentieth-century revivals of his operas; see Chapter Three for more on this.

sense of a spatial setting exemplified by a particular time or temporality, but as a decade that exhibits a precise ideological space, a certain coherence.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, I am not attempting to define late operatic modernity as a discrete succession of sounds or styles, but rather as a network of ideas, people and discourses—and to see the Venetian context in this sense as constitutive. I am interested, above all, in the artistic and critical nexus that produced and received the events in question.

Musical life in the city was quick to get going after the war.<sup>51</sup> The music festival reopened in 1946 and by 1950, as was repeated across the nation, expenditure on theatres, opera houses and concert halls had already begun to exceed that of the immediate postwar period.<sup>52</sup> Venice was also re-emerging as a place of modernist art. Peggy Guggenheim settled there in 1947, opening her art gallery in the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni to the public in 1951. She became acquainted with and began to exhibit work by Venetian modernists such as Giuseppe Santomaso and Emilio Vedova, both of whom had in 1945 been founding members of the important postwar movement *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*. The Biennale began again in 1948.

There were two interconnected cultural-theoretical perspectives that governed the postwar period: an ongoing Crocean idealism and a revitalised Marxism. The former was premised on an understanding of autonomous aesthetic categories—exhibited by a ‘true’ culture—that could thus be seen as free from political contamination. According to this view, anything promoted as propaganda was not, in this sense, real art. Marxists conversely interpreted Fascist culture in terms of ‘expressive causality’—as an expression of the economic and class base that underpinned it. In other words, culture was a superstructure manifestation of a

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<sup>50</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982). As Christopher Duggan has written of the character of the 1950s: ‘They are a time of contrasts and paradoxes, of deliberate and sometimes cynical amnesia and remorse, of political continuities and of cravings for renewal and change; and they are a time when Italy seemed to have lost faith in much of its past’; Duggan, ‘Italy in the Cold War Years and the Legacy of Fascism’, in Duggan and Jonathan Wagstaff, eds., *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society 1948–58* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 1–24, here 1.

<sup>51</sup> For an overview of aspects of musical life in postwar Venice, see Renzo Cresti, ed., *Venezia: autori, musiche e situazioni* (Bologna: Quaderni di Octandre, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, the statistics in SIAE, *Lo spettacolo in Italia: annuario statistico. Anno 1950* (Rome: SIAE, 1951), v; and Marcello Ruggieri, ‘L’assetto istituzionale e il sistema produttivo’, in Guido Salvetti e Bianca Maria Antolini, eds., *Italia millenovecentocinquanta* (Milan: Filippetti, 2003 [1999]), 31–64.

reactionary base. Any response or insurrection against this had thus to be both politically and aesthetically committed.<sup>53</sup>

These divisive camps and their perspectives on modernity and modernisation underpinned the politics of the first postwar Biennali. At an administrative and institutional level, there was a perceived need for the festivals to change their rhetoric and self-representation in accordance with the more sober mood of the later 1940s and early 1950s. A new Special Commissioner was elected—Giovanni Ponti, who had recently been appointed Mayor of Venice by the Committee of National Liberation.<sup>54</sup> In 1950, Ponti became the founding president of the Società Europa di Cultura (SEC), which—under the aegis of the Biennale—sought to assert art as an international language and conduit for transnational relations, rather than for political purposes. This was a position fundamentally hostile to the Communists, and so created a battleground over the ethics of modernism that governed cultural policy at the Biennale (and the music festival) into the 1950s.<sup>55</sup>

This thesis, then, is focussed on operatic culture in Venice from 1951 to 1961. More specifically, it looks at theatrical works performed at La Fenice under the auspices of the music festival. A consequence of this narrowed perspective is that other important locales for opera and modernism in the mid-century are sidelined or omitted altogether. This is as much a matter of pragmatism as of theoretical orientation: for

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<sup>53</sup> The two positions were connected in part because the source of renewed interest in the philosophy of Benedetto Croce in the postwar period was Antonio Gramsci's discussion of it in his *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1975 [1948]). These two prevailing philosophies were to have important repercussions for the politics of continuity: on whether the Fascist period (and its culture) could be brushed aside as an anomaly, or whether it had to be engaged with and repudiated. For more on the politics of postwar continuity and discontinuity, see Chapter Two.

<sup>54</sup> Ponti lost to the PCI mayoral candidate in March 1946 but retained his position at the Biennale. Together with the newly appointed Secretary General, Rodolfo Palluchini, he sought to restore the buildings of the Biennale, raise new funds (partly in compensation from the film industry for its use of the site during the war) and programme a series of modernist exhibits intended to reaffirm 'the new climate of liberty'; Palluchini, quoted in Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 133. Ponti was a humanities professor, politician and activist, member of the DC and self-proclaimed anti-Fascist. These credentials were reinforced by his being a hero of the Resistance, having been arrested in January 1945 and tortured by the Banda Carità; for more on Ponti, see Silvio Tramontin, *Giovanni Ponti (1896-1961): una vita per la democrazia e per Venezia* (Venice: Comune di Venezia, Ufficio Affari Istituzionali, 1983). For an example of the exhibitions he staged in Venice, see Ponti, *Cinque secoli di pittura Veneta* (Venice: Procuratie Nuove, 1945), 8.

<sup>55</sup> For more on the political conflicts over Europeanism that governed aesthetic choices at the Biennale, see Nancy Jachec, *Politics and Paintings at the Venice Biennale 1948-64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

the amount of detail I wanted to go in to here—within the scope of a doctoral thesis—a broader perspective was unmanageable. But I also wanted to experiment with focussing on an idiosyncratic locale in an oft-overlooked decade—an ‘edge moment’, to borrow Benjamin Piekut’s phrase—to see what light it could shed on larger discourses and infrastructures.<sup>56</sup> This is not to suggest anything especially significant about Venice: I am not arguing here for its primacy over other locations for operatic activity at this point; it simply provides one way into this moment in the twentieth-century history of opera.

That is not to deny, however, something special about the city. As we have already discovered, Venice by the 1950s was established as an important site of avant-garde activity—one that jarred with the city’s public image in intriguing ways. Furthermore, the positioning of Venice under Fascist cultural policy had left it in a particularly troublesome and uncertain position during the war’s immediate aftermath, a position that demanded answers to some of the period’s toughest cultural questions. The decade was also an exciting and dramatic time for musical life in the city: it was host to some of the most important operatic events of the period—both nationally and internationally, with large cosmopolitan audiences and a revitalised press there to bear witness.

Chapter Two looks at the premiere of Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* at La Fenice during the 1951 festival. The performance—a much hyped media event—immediately entered into the heart of postwar Italian musical debates. An epithet repeatedly attributed to *The Rake* in the press was that it was a ‘true opera’, and yet its music was received as disturbing as well as satisfying. Critics were, for one thing, unsettled by Stravinsky’s reliance on the past, and responded by identifying what several called a ‘dialectic’ between the conventional and original aspects of his compositional style. This ‘ritorno all’antico’ was, meanwhile, becoming a feature of contemporary media culture via the network broadcasting of opera on radio and the steady release of opera on record. Concomitantly, Italian theatres such as La Fenice were becoming increasingly reliant on past classics (a circumstance precipitated in part by the financially-straitened aftermath of the Second World War). They were, in

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<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 8. My methodology also draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).



other words, solidifying into *lieux de mémoire* at a time otherwise more occupied with forgetting the past and looking to the future.<sup>57</sup>

Through an investigation of *The Rake* and its Italian reception, I seek to demonstrate how the opera came to embody the polarised concerns of the postwar period: of heritage recuperation and cultural remembering, bureaucratic and administrative forgetting and *tabula rasa* crisis. In doing so, I want to suggest that *The Rake* formed part of a broader postwar movement concerned with the role of memory and the cultural past. Such anxieties were as much to do with a sense of cultural malaise precipitated by recent technological developments and a burgeoning mass media, as with the much-hyped notion of operatic crisis. Revisiting *The Rake* in a new context, I pursue moments of simultaneity and contiguity in the reception with the wider discourses into which it fed, both to challenge its traditional historiographical positioning and to provoke reconsideration of the mid-century nexus between opera, high modernism and technology.

These preoccupations with the increasingly museographic nature of the cultural past were also played out at another operatic occasion that same week: the revival of Verdi's *Attila* (1846). Chapter Three looks at how the revival marked a high point in a year of events to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the composer's death. The performance of a long-neglected opera by the nation's favourite composer became a locus for the specific features of Verdian discussion that year. In particular, the opera formed part of a broader preoccupation with posterity, something that was a growing cultural concern of the immediate postwar period. *Attila* was co-opted into the debate on posterity in several ways. Prior to the performance, critics were quick to label the opera a future classic, despite few having heard it. This meant it required a particular kind of judgement, one to decide whether *Attila* was worthy of inclusion in the 'museum' of opera.

In addition, the opera's complicated historical trajectory since its premiere made it an appropriate vehicle for historical stocktaking, a contemporary cultural phenomenon that saw historians and journalists rewriting the history of the Risorgimento in light of recent events. Concomitantly, critics emphasised that this was a moment of the politicisation of Verdi's image and his music. Finally, the

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<sup>57</sup> Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman and trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996 [1984-92]).

Venetian commemoration was also a media event, with both old and new technologies engaged in recording the proceedings for a future audience—something that stirred much anxiety in the press. In this chapter, I excavate the ideological and historical stakes in this particular case of Verdi commemoration, and suggest that opera at this moment served as a particular locus for ideas of national loss and historical rewriting, nostalgia and emotion.

Chapter Four turns to the 1959 festival and its commissioning of three one-act music theatre pieces to demonstrate the vitality of theatrical activity in Italy. The occasion was the festival's official response to more general calls of opera crisis in public discourse, intended to suggest a myriad of possible artistic directions. The resultant works were Luciano Berio's *Allez-hop*, Alberto Bruni Tedeschi's *Diagramma circolare* and Gino Negri's *Il circo Max*. Whether through subversion or direct engagement, all three were concerned with a similar theme—namely, the devastating aftermath of war. Bruni Tedeschi sought to thrust his ideology onto the audience in typical modernist fashion, while Berio and Negri instead wanted their works to be considered more open, capable of being read in different ways.

The reception of the performance was similarly divided, marking a shift in contemporary music criticism. While normally keen to promote firebrand political modernism, leftist Italian critics—seeming to have grown tired of this—criticised Bruni Tedeschi for making his musical conception too subservient to a political message. Instead they praised Berio for the 'openness' of *Allez-hop*. 1959 was in fact the same year that Umberto Eco began to publish essays (in a musical context) on his idea of *opera aperta*—an embryonic term premised on notions of indeterminacy and openness; 'Opera aperta' was also the working title of Berio's theatre piece. Although at the time the movement was called a *neoavanguardia*, it crystallised around critical and literary ideals later to be seen as synonymous with postmodernism. In this chapter, I examine how emergent Italian literary postmodernism was intimately connected to a previously neglected musical moment, one earlier than any accounted for by standard histories of musical postmodernism. Furthermore, I read this as a particularly Italian postmodernism, one that stemmed from the rhetoric and preoccupation with crisis that were a feature of 1950s' musical debate.

The final chapter, on the premiere of Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* at the 1961 festival, in some senses represents a retreat from 1959 back to high modernism.

Prompted by the premiere, the critical press began a series of debates and redefinitions in response to what struck them most: how noisy the opera was. Although they agreed that Nono's work was unlikely to be popular with a broad public, many immediately recognised that *Intolleranza* could serve to recall the horrors of Fascism and the sounds of war—to offer, in other words, a warning call that history must not repeat itself. In a debate in the Communist newspaper *L'Unità*, the hubbub was interpreted as a new kind of realism, formed in order to use memories of the Fascist regime as an allegory of contemporary oppression. The potency of the opera's noise was seen as in part due to Nono's incorporation of the auditory experiences of cinema and television, thus providing an insight into how traditionally elite genres such as theatre and opera could respond to the emergence and increasing hegemony of new mass entertainments. The chapter seeks to place *Intolleranza* within these conflicting discourses, which emerged at the beginning of the 1960s, and argue that the opera's modernist ideology of noise as a realist lens made it the most timely work imaginable.

The chapters each focus on aesthetic moments that reflect the characteristics and transformations of the 1950s. The decade marked the heyday and decline of the Left in Italy. Towards the end of the 1940s the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) dominated cultural debate, despite having been sidelined from government shortly after the 1948 elections.<sup>58</sup> By the mid-1950s the PCI had over two million members, making it the largest far-Left party in Western Europe. It also had a particularly distinctive make-up: from peasants in the south to industrial workers in the north, as well as intellectuals, artisans and artists. In the immediate postwar years, the PCI was given renewed intellectual fuel by the publication of Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere* (1948).

However, with everyday affluence steadily increasing as the so-called 'economic miracle' got under way, the two parties began to lose impetus. Between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s, Italy was transformed from a predominantly agricultural society into an industrial one.<sup>59</sup> New levels of mass consumption and attendant changes to

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the political situation postwar, see Chapter Two.

<sup>59</sup> Paolo Spriano notes that in 1946, 36% of the workforce was involved in agriculture, while factory production looked set to decline. Production levels to match those of the prewar period were only achieved in 1951; Spriano, *Le passioni di un decennio (1946-1956)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1986), 79. See also, Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005). For another example of a

modes of production (the evolving nature of factory work) were transforming the boundaries of popular culture; as historian Stefano Pivato writes: ‘Italians consumed as never before and our country exported refrigerators, washing machines, cars, televisions, precision instruments and typewriters’.<sup>60</sup> Such a scene—with all its consequent noise—was evoked in Luciano Bianciardi’s novel *La vita agra* (1962):

Chi non ha l’automobile l’avrà e poi ne daremo due per famiglia, e poi una a testa, daremo anche un televisore a ciascuno, due televisori, due frigoriferi, due lavatrici automatiche, tre apparecchi radio, il rasoio elettrico, la bilancina da bagno, l’asciugacapelli, il bidet e l’acqua calda. A tutti. Purché tutti lavorino, purché siano pronti a scarpinare, a fare polvere, a pestarsi i piedi, a tafanarsi l’un con l’altro dalla mattina alla sera.<sup>61</sup>

[He who does not have a car will get one, and then we will give each family two; we shall give everyone a television, two televisions, two refrigerators, two washing machines, three radios, an electric razor, a set of bathroom scales, a hairdryer, a bidet and running hot water. Everyone shall have them. That is provided they all work, and are ready to tramp along together, raising the dust and treading on each other’s toes, annoying one another from dawn to dusk.]

While some intellectuals, such as Eco and Negri, understood the need to engage directly with the insurgence of an Americanised mass culture, many in the PCI failed to recognise the serious implications for their own intellectual position.<sup>62</sup>

Other factors remained more constant as the decade progressed: the lingering strength of regional over national affiliation (although this began to give way in the early 1960s, with the increasing hegemony of mass media); the continuing power of older values such as the family in the face of modernity and modernisation; the continued authority of the church, both with and against the state (here given new life by the dominance of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) in government); an ongoing vocality of the working classes and white collar workers—and their use as a discursive trope by intellectuals; an incessant and burdensome bureaucracy; and a regionalised

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study of this period as told from a local perspective, see Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle*. For more on the economic miracle and its effect on music culture, see Chapter Five.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Gli italiani consumano come mai in precedenza e il nostro paese esporta all’estero frigoriferi, lavatrici, automobili, televisori, strumenti di precisione e macchine da scrivere’; Stefano Pivato, *Il secolo del rumore: il paesaggio sonoro del novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 151.

<sup>61</sup> Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962), 176.

<sup>62</sup> The increasing inability of the PCI to retain a grasp of the cultural climate in Italy during the 1950s is discussed in Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (London: Verso, 2009). He notes that this was in fact more a feature of the PCI than the PSI: the latter instead realised the importance of analysing industrial change—giving birth to the peculiar Italian phenomenon of *operaismo*.

and polarised politics. Read within this broader fabric, the case studies that follow suggest ways in which music in the aftermath of war served often conflicting, but highly specific functions in society—ways in which people were encountering and articulating music culture in the mid-century.

Before we continue, however, a few disclaimers are in order. First, the focus on Venice renders this very much a study about a specific northern Italian city. As a result, it is problematic to make claims about northern Italy *en masse*, and even more so about Italy as a whole. The country at this point, with its political and regional divisions, is an apt example of Ernst Bloch's idea of nonsynchronicity in relation to modes of production—'Not all people exist in the same now'—and here I can only claim to be talking about a few.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, I am primarily dealing with opera, which by this point had become the preserve of high culture (*cultura* in the Italian sense): when I refer to music and music culture in what follows, it is to this specific area of activity. Although I am interested in the genre's relationship with mass media, this is mainly discussed from the perspective of leftist intellectuals invested in the former. A study of opera from an alternative perspective, as well as consideration of other forms of entertainment such as popular song and theatre, fall beyond the remit of the thesis. Partly as a consequence of this, the contemporary debates I read and address here are primarily those of public (predominantly male) debate: mainstream press, specialist journals, memoirs, monographs, etc.<sup>64</sup>

Part of my purpose in what follows is to add contrary shades to long-established histories of mid-century European music. The history of music in the 1950s has tended to be one of serialism, Darmstadt and the use of electroacoustics for abstraction. I wish to show instead that there were other, equally important, spheres of music-making: of a more committed, openly political music; emerging similarities between neoclassicism and the operatic canon; an avant-garde theatre envisaged as a response to opera crisis.<sup>65</sup> In addition, although this period of the Cold War has

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<sup>63</sup> Ernst Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics', *New German Critique* 11 (1977), 22-38, here 22.

<sup>64</sup> For an overview of the nature of the Italian press at this time, see 'L'Unità e i giornali borghesi', in Spriano, *Le passioni di un decennio (1946-1956)*, 103-27.

<sup>65</sup> Important work in complicating our understanding of music, especially opera, at mid-century has been done by Heather Wiebe and Christopher Chowrimootoo. See Wiebe, *Britten's Unquiet Past: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Chowrimootoo, 'Bourgeois Opera: *Death in Venice* and the Aesthetics of Sublimation', *Cambridge*

tended to be conceived musically as a clash between Soviet socialist realism and the Western avant-garde, Italy here presents a more complicated picture: one where avant-garde music could be used to promote socialism, and an appropriately socialist realist style was reminiscent of the soundscapes of Americanised media.<sup>66</sup>

The decade 1951 to 1961 also represents a rather overlooked period in Italian history: studies have tended to focus instead on the end of the war and its immediate aftermath (1943-50) and the height of the economic miracle (1958-63). Even less scholarship has been devoted to musical culture in Italy during this period.<sup>67</sup> The same is true of Venetian history. Despite the vast number of studies, both scholarly and popular, of the city—something in part enabled by the extensive records kept in the Venetian archives—the majority of scholars have tended to focus on earlier periods, particularly that of the republic and empire, and the period leading up to the invasion of Napoleon in 1797.<sup>68</sup> Recent scholarship has begun to redress this, focussing on the city in the twentieth century; it is to this emergent trend that I also wish to contribute.<sup>69</sup>

The reach of this thesis, then, is broad, engaging as it does with various discussions in musicology, urban geography, media theory and cultural history. But its overarching question—of what was happening to opera culture by the 1950s, as told through the case study of Venice—is highly specific. Through focussing on particular moments under the rubric of the chapters, a picture emerges of opera enmeshed in perceptions of crisis, but also enjoying a resurgence; of opera threatened by mass media, while simultaneously using such new experiences for its renewal; and of opera as an ongoing locus of historiographical rewriting, as well as of emotion and memory.

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*Opera Journal* 22/2 (2010), 175-216, and Chowrimootoo, 'The Timely Traditions of *Albert Herring*', *The Opera Quarterly* 27/4 (2012), 379-419.

<sup>66</sup> A similar point has been made by Lisa Jakelski in relation to the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music; see Jakelski, 'The Changing Seasons of the Warsaw Autumn: Contemporary Music in Poland, 1960-1990' (Ph.D. dissertation: University of California, Berkeley, 2009).

<sup>67</sup> One exception to this is Raymond Fearn, *Italian Opera Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1998), which remains one of the few book-length studies of this period.

<sup>68</sup> Many of these histories have tended either to reinforce or examine myths such as the city as an early model of civic government and a location of aristocratic decadence. On these and other myths of the city, see Mario Infelise, 'Venezia e il suo passato. Storie mite "fole"', in Isnenghi and Woolf, eds., *Storia di Venezia*, vol. 2, 967-88.

<sup>69</sup> Renewed interest in this period in Venice's history is evidenced by the number of theses that have recently been devoted to the topic: see, for example, Scappettone, 'Venice and the Digressive Invention of the Modern: Restrospection's Futurity'; Longo, 'Culture, Tourism and Fascism in Venice, 1919-1945'; and Ferris's book based on her 2005 dissertation, *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929-40*.

Fascism may have cast a deep and long shadow, but musical life in its wake was also a story of myriad paths into the future, ones laden with hope and the possibility for transformation. It is through such multiplicity and fecundity that I want to guide us in what follows, to take us on one particular mid-century operatic journey.

## Chapter Two

### Presenting the Past:

### Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, 1951

Torniamo all'antico e sarà un progresso.<sup>1</sup>

The word 'classic' has a somewhat chilly sound.<sup>2</sup>

On our present purpose the past weighs.<sup>3</sup>

#### A night at the opera

On 11 September 1951, Venice witnessed a familiar kind of spectacle: a newsworthy opera premiere at the Teatro La Fenice. Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* was staged as part of the city's Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea (hosted by the famous Biennale).<sup>4</sup> A large crowd interspersed with *paparazzi* gathered round the cordoned-off perimeters of the Campo San Fantin; patrons, celebrities and famous figures from the western-European and American intelligentsia disembarked from gondolas and *motoscafi*, entering La Fenice on the canal side. Dressed in fur and silk, members of the audience, although in keeping with the plush loges and flower-adorned cornices of the opera house, glittered conspicuously in a Venice still embroiled in postwar poverty.<sup>5</sup> Rumours of the fee Stravinsky had commanded for conducting the opera, as well as the extortionate prices for seats, became a fixation of both the

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<sup>1</sup> Verdi, letter to Francesco Florimo (January 1871); cited in Florimo, *Riccardo Wagner ed i wagneristi* (Ancona: A.G. Morelli, 1983), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Wöflin; quoted as an epigraph to Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1975]), 15.

<sup>3</sup> W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011 [1947]), 18.

<sup>4</sup> The opening night was conducted by Stravinsky; a second performance on 13 September was conducted by Ferdinand Leitner. Anne was sung by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Tom Rakewell by Robert Rounseville, Nick Shadow by Otakar Kraus, Trulove by Raffaele Eriè, Baba the Turk by Jennie Tourel and Mamma Goose by Nell Tangeman. The staging was designed by Gianni Ratto with costumes by Ebe Colciaghi.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Craft called the premiere 'an *ancien-régime* event'; Craft, *Down a Path of Wonder* (Norfolk: Naxos Books, 2006), 149. The disparities in Venice were stark: the city had just come to the end of the five-year term of the first Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) mayor, Giovanni Battista Gianquinto, and a new Democrazia Cristiana (DC) mayor, Angelo Spanio, had won the recent election. While much of the city languished in postwar depression and unemployment, there was a new influx of the European mega-rich, who travelled to the city in their yachts.



local and national press.<sup>6</sup>

The occasion marked Stravinsky's first return to Europe since he had emigrated to America at the start of the Second World War, and was for that reason—as well as the fact he had written an opera—much anticipated. Contemporary accounts stressed that the premiere was a press event on a previously unseen scale, with hundreds of journalists descending on Venice to witness, depending on one's attitude, either the death throes of opera or its miraculous rejuvenation.<sup>7</sup> The excitement of the local press was palpable; photos of Stravinsky, first in rehearsal in Milan and then arriving in Venice, graced the covers of even the glossy weeklies. When the premiere finally came to pass, those who stayed to the end (the performance severely overran), gave Stravinsky a twenty-minute standing ovation. Thus the evening played out, in all its lengthiness and spectacle, rather like a night at a nineteenth-century grand opera.<sup>8</sup> The 'first night' reviews were full of conventional plaudits: 'Successo molto caloroso', 'Successo straordinariamente entusiastico', 'uno straordinario successo'.

Yet beyond these initial exclamations there were murmurs of dissent and uncertainty. *Il giornale* claimed that 'the musical world was polarised',<sup>9</sup> the *Corriere della sera* that, 'the confusion was general', the evocations of older music 'an odd and mysterious return to the past'.<sup>10</sup> Mario Nordio wrote in Venice's *Gazzettino-sera* that after a hesitant response from the audience at the start: 'In subsequent acts it was a lively success, but more deferential—we would say—than convinced. A certain perplexity was obvious among the listeners'.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Andrea Della Corte, 'Il mondan rumore internazionale per la nuova opera di Igor Stravinsky', *La nuova stampa* (8 September 1951).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Giovanni Fabbro, 'Una prima assoluta al Festival di Venezia: Igor Stravinsky ha varato la *Carriera del libertino*', *L'Adige* (13 September 1951); and Matteo Glinski, 'Ancora di Stravinsky', *L'osservatore romano* (16 September 1951). Articles were even devoted to analysing the press reception: "'Una data nella storia della musica": echi sulla stampa mondiale della "prima" di Stravinsky', *Il gazzettino* (6 November 1951); and Mario Nordio, 'Contrastanti giudizi su *The Rake's Progress*', *Gazzettino-sera* (15-16 September 1951).

<sup>8</sup> One critic commented that an event of 'una febbre simile, una curiosità simile e un simile *battage* giornalistico' (a similar fever, a similar curiosity and a similar journalistic 'hype') had not been seen since the premiere of Puccini's *Turandot* in 1926; Giulio Confalonieri, 'Grande cronache a Venezia: vigilia di Stravinski', *Il tempo di Milano* (11 September 1951).

<sup>9</sup> 'del mondo musicale è polarizzato'; Antonino Procida, 'Il messaggio di Stravinsky e il suo *Rake's Progress*', *Il giornale* (September 1951).

<sup>10</sup> 'la confusione è generale ... uno stravagante e misterioso ritorno al passato'; Franco Abbiati, 'Una "prima" mondiale a Venezia: la *Carriera del libertino* di Stravinski accolta con successo al Festival musicale', *Corriere della sera* (12 September 1951).

<sup>11</sup> 'Negli atti successivi il successo è stato pure vivo, ma più deferente—vorremmo dire—che convinto. Era manifesta negli ascoltatori una certa perplessità'; Nordio, 'XIV Festival di musica contemporanea: un avvenimento d'arte alla Fenice. *Rake's Progress* di Stravinsky acclamato da un pubblico d'eccezione',

Stravinsky was immediately aware of the reservations: his wife Vera recorded that in the first-act intermission they retired to the Campo to drink *caffè espresso* and ‘avoid impertinent judgements’.<sup>12</sup> The confusion is, on the face of it, rather surprising: Stravinsky had, after all, been composing in what had been dubbed his ‘neoclassical’ style since the early 1920s. But there was something about this instance—of hearing older music within an opera premiere—that seemed to disconcert critics, Italian critics especially. Not only was it troublesome to learn that such a hyped *new* work was so reliant on the past; it was also that the past in question was particularly problematic. Far from the ancient Arcadia or *commedia dell’arte* one might have expected from Stravinsky, the opera recalled more recent history. In addition, the aftermath of war had reignited debates about opera crisis, debates that centred on a vocabulary of the museographic and sepulchral. In its portrayal of revenants of opera’s past, *The Rake* seemingly embodied these contemporary concerns. The place of these revenants in a society that was emerging into the postwar future—a predicament only amplified by the Venetian setting—was to become the touchstone of the opera’s first critics.

The desire for a retreat into the past had its own intricate contemporary politics, one underpinned by economic circumstance: a wealth discrepancy also on display at the premiere. The occasion showcased decadence and austerity—between Hollywood celebrity and the new mega-rich, and the impoverished inhabitants of an old European city.<sup>13</sup> The *Realpolitik* such divides provoked was pushed to the forefront of public debate, as the politics of forgetting became the status quo under an increasingly hegemonic mass media. As the historian Mirco Dondi claims, postwar, Italians ‘wanted to shrug off their past, without having time to understand what it really meant. Divisions between Italians were to be overcome under the common

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*Gazzettino-sera* (12-13 September 1951), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Vera Stravinsky’s recollection of the premiere was published for the programme booklet of the Boston Opera production in 1953; quoted in I. Stravinsky and Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 237.

<sup>13</sup> Another celebrity media event of 1951 that exemplified the gap between rich and poor also took place in Venice: South American millionaire Carlos de Beistegui held his masquerade ball at the Palazzo Labia on 3 September 1951. The ball was immediately described in the press as ‘the party of the century’. The international jet-set descended on the city in the first major display of affluence after the war. Just like the premiere of Stravinsky’s opera eight days later, it was another mass media event: *paparazzi* lined the red carpet to the Palazzo; Cecil Beaton photographed the ball for a large spread in *Vogue*. That the event was denounced by the leftwing press even made its way into the reception of *The Rake*. Massimo Mila noted, for example, that the closing moral of the opera’s Epilogue brought to mind Beistegui’s party of the week before; Mila, ‘Il libertino di Stravinski gioca a carte col diavolo’, *L’Unità* (12 September 1951).

effort of re-launching the country economically. Forgetfulness and prosperity seemed to go together'.<sup>14</sup> These broader tensions between remembering and forgetting, older spectacles and new media, played out on another level at the premiere: while the audience enjoyed a typical night at the opera, the pageantry was captured and disseminated by an increasingly powerful mass media.<sup>15</sup> Premiered under the auspices of Milan's Teatro alla Scala, the Venice Biennale and Radio audizioni italiane (RAI), the performance was recorded for radio broadcast, later to be released on record.<sup>16</sup>

In what follows, I want to explore further these Italian discussions surrounding *The Rake's* premiere—to excavate an attempt to rehabilitate opera culture in the aftermath of war. I will begin by looking at how the opera formed part of a broader practice of recuperation, a trend in cultural politics that jarred with the tendency in contemporary social and administrative politics to focus on the future at the expense of the past. This mismatch—together with the opera's suggestion of a museum of musical works—provoked a series of increasingly fraught questions, as critics tried to make sense of its reliance on older styles. I will then proceed to consider how the central values that emerged in the reception—of form and order, organicism, 'neo-obbiettività' and eclecticism—were being simultaneously developed in journals concerned with the sound culture of new media. At the centre of *The Rake's* reception was thus a two-fold preoccupation: how marmorealised 'fossils' could again become enchanting objects, and the evident stakes needed to reinforce *The Rake* as both a 'modern' and a 'true' opera—and to bring these aspects in line with emergent debates on the sensory experiences of new media.

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<sup>14</sup> Mirco Dondi, 'The Fascist Mentality after Fascism', in R.J.B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani, eds., *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 141-60, here 151. Anna Maria Torriglia claims that proliferation of leisure entertainments across the classes postwar promoted a forgetting of recent hardships that began to level out economic divides; see Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 117-18.

<sup>15</sup> Postwar, such mass media—namely film and radio—were regularly sending pictorial traffic back and forth across the Atlantic. *Voices of Venice* (1951), a film made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer for an American audience, shows Venetians guiding the viewer around their city, describing (in English) the history of its various *piazze, campi* and *calli*. Released as part of James Fitzpatrick's 'Travel Talks' series, 'Visiting Italy', the film formed part of a widespread attempt to encourage tourism to Venice after the war.

<sup>16</sup> The premiere was recorded by RAI but not released by Fonit Cetra (DOC 29) until 1982. A studio recording was released in 1953 by Columbia (SL-125) in the US and by Philips abroad; for more on this see Edward Mendelson, *Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings by W. H. Auden, 1939-1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

However, I also frame these discourses in the Venetian locale of *The Rake's* premiere. Put simply, without ignoring larger national and transnational contexts, I will explore what it meant to hear Stravinsky's 'ritorno all'antico' (a phrase ubiquitous in the press) in Venice in 1951. I want to suggest that if contemporary ideas of postwar modernity are viewed from both local and national perspectives, the contexts can reflect and influence each other in intriguing ways, ways that can in turn provide interpretative frameworks both for *The Rake's* reception and for its position in music history more generally. Situating the opera in a geographical locale affects our understanding of its historiographical positioning: if Italy's modernity is viewed as that of a series of antagonisms and reconciliations between past and present, old and new, Walter Benjamin's 'then' and 'now', *The Rake* may appear not so much to inhabit an anomalous position in twentieth-century music history, but rather to reside at the centre of notions of mid-century modernity.

## Present futures

How *The Rake* came to be premiered in the city is a story of thwarted commissions and protracted negotiations.<sup>17</sup> The opera was eventually bought, not commissioned, by the 14<sup>th</sup> festival in Venice. The composer and cultural entrepreneur Nicholas Nabokov discussed the matter with Mario Labroca, the music director of RAI, and an offer had been agreed.<sup>18</sup> Stravinsky was immediately keen to accept: the remuneration was excellent, and he thought La Fenice a suitable venue in terms of size and design.<sup>19</sup> La Fenice was an appropriate setting for other reasons—albeit ones that Stravinsky himself would not have endorsed. For a composer who, by this point, was perceived as residing outside the mainstream of musical modernism, it was fitting that *The Rake*

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<sup>17</sup> Stravinsky had initially flirted with premiering *The Rake* either at Covent Garden or the Edinburgh Festival, before settling on an American premiere. The two principal options were a small Victorian theatre in Central City, Colorado, where Stravinsky had seen a performance of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in 1948, and the University of Southern California's Opera Department, where Stravinsky's friend Carl Ebert was based. Both were to come to nothing, although Stravinsky employed Ebert to direct the Venetian production.

<sup>18</sup> For the correspondence between Nicholas Nabokov and Stravinsky pertaining to *The Rake's* genesis, see Craft, ed., *Stravinsky: Selected Correspondence*, vol. 2 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 375-84.

<sup>19</sup> In fact La Fenice had expressed an interest before Stravinsky had even begun composing the opera, and Stravinsky himself had floated Venice as a possible location to Ralph Hawkes as early as 1949. The contract was finally signed on 6 February 1951. Stravinsky's direct negotiations with the festival in Venice had caused consternation with Boosey and Hawkes, who were still in the process of making separate plans with Covent Garden. The production then had to be hurried through: it was not until July that La Scala was enlisted.

was premiered in a more provincial theatre, located in a city that had its own ambiguous relationship with conceptions of modernity.<sup>20</sup>

Stravinsky, by this point thoroughly deracinated, was trying to reassert himself on the European music scene.<sup>21</sup> The Biennale was also involved in a process of self-reincarnation, disavowing, especially in the case of the music festival and the Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica, its Fascist legacy.<sup>22</sup> Although the broader institutional concern of the Biennale was thus dissociation from the recent past, much of the festival that year was concerned with recalling recent music history. There was a hastily arranged commemoration of Schoenberg, who had died on 13 July 1951,<sup>23</sup> and also a 'Commemorazione del cinquantesimo della morte di Giuseppe Verdi'.<sup>24</sup> One critic claimed that, with these dual commemorations and the premiere of Stravinsky's opera, the festival 'has fulfilled its delicate task of an orientation and balance between tradition and modernity'.<sup>25</sup>

*The Rake* echoed with these retrospective reappraisals, presenting music of a more locally-resonant and viscerally-felt past. The *Corriere della sera* noted that this

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<sup>20</sup> There was even an autochthonous Venetian element in the plot: the pictorial source for William Hogarth's *The Rake's Progress* (the inspiration for Stravinsky's opera) was the Italian series 'La Vita del Lascivo'; the Venetian sources for Hogarth's work are discussed further in E. H. Gombrich, 'A Classical "Rake's Progress"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15/3-4 (1952), 254-56, and Hilde Kurz, 'Italian Models of Hogarth's Picture Stories', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15/3-4 (1952), 136-68.

<sup>21</sup> Stravinsky's biography contained its own Venetian history: having first visited the city with Vaslav Nijinsky and Sergei Diaghilev in 1912, he returned to perform his Piano Sonata in 1925, *Capriccio* in 1934, *Jeu de cartes* in 1937 and *Orpheus* in 1948. His Venetian reputation consolidated with *The Rake*, *Canticum Sacrum* (1956), *Threni* (1958) and *Monumentum* (1960) were also premiered there. Plans were drawn up for a 'Presenza di Stravinsky' to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1982, but these were partially thwarted by inclement weather.

<sup>22</sup> Both festivals had been established as offshoots of the Biennale by the Fascists, in 1930 and 1932 respectively. Stravinsky was also trying to disavow his relationship with the regime. This has been much discussed elsewhere: suffice it to say here that the relationship constitutes a notable omission in the reception of *The Rake*. For more on Stravinsky's politics, see Richard Taruskin, 'Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology', *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 16/3 (1993), 286-302; and Craft and V. Stravinsky, 'Stravinsky's Politics: Left, Right, Left', in *Stravinsky in Pictures and Documents* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 547-58.

<sup>23</sup> For further information on the 'Commemorazione di Arnold Schoenberg', see Michele Girardi and Franco Rossi, *Il Teatro La Fenice. Cronologia degli spettacoli 1938-1991*, vol. 2 (Venice: Albrizzi, 1992), and La Fenice's online database: <http://www.archivioscolafenice.org/ArcFenice/ShowFile.ashx?fileType=Show&id=41230> (Accessed 20 February 2012).

<sup>24</sup> For more on the Verdi commemorations, see Chapter Three.

<sup>25</sup> 'ha assolto il suo delicato compito di orientamento e di equilibrio tra tradizione e contemporaneità'; Alessandro Piovesan, 'Il XIV Festival di musica contemporanea: notte trasfigurata di Schoenberg', *Fiera letteraria* (14 October 1951). Nancy Jachec argues that this juxtaposition of old and new was the guiding policy of the art Biennale at this time, with its showcasing of latest activity together with 'great historical retrospectives'; in Jachec, *Politics and Paintings at the Venice Biennale 1948-64: Italy and the Idea of Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 36.

was very much in contrast to an earlier Venetian neoclassicism: the tombs, memorials and sculptures of the Renaissance artist, Antonio Canova, ‘si guardava assai più indietro’ (looked much further back).<sup>26</sup> Within a broader scaffolding of stylistic allusion to Mozart (namely, *Così fan tutte* and *Don Giovanni*) are nestled a host of other imitations and citations: from the sound world of Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607) to the trumpet solo in the prelude to the second act of Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* (1843). Italian critics were quick to point out the profligate use of their national idiom—‘uno zibaldone’ (a hotchpotch) of Rossini, Donizetti and Verdi—and yet remained unsure what to make of this reliance.<sup>27</sup>

While a new generation of young Venetian composers such as Luigi Nono and Bruno Maderna were embracing serialism and starting to make the regular pilgrimage to Darmstadt, revivals of previously forgotten works—the very works Stravinsky’s opera evoked—were seen as providing one path out of the state of contemporary opera. The rhetoric of crisis surrounding the genre in the 1950s was a common feature of musical discourse on both sides of the Atlantic, exemplified by two polemical texts released only a few years after *The Rake’s* premiere: T.W. Adorno’s essay ‘Bourgeois Opera’ of 1955, which launched an attack on contemporary operatic culture, proclaiming the genre had become kitsch and criticising its harvesting of a museum;<sup>28</sup> and Joseph Kerman’s *Opera as Drama* of 1956, which sought to reclaim the terms of such debate, isolating an ever-effulgent catalogue of classics from the continual river of new and old that flowed through operatic culture.<sup>29</sup> Such transnational debate was primarily two-pronged: concerned with the place of an ever-expanding catalogue of classic works, as well as with the coexistence of this operatic museum culture with the new.

Perceptions of opera crisis had their own resonance in Venice in 1951. Venetian critic Giuseppe Pugliese wrote that the scandal of the festival the previous year had been the lack of any opera programming whatsoever; ‘We heard talk of

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<sup>26</sup> Abbiati, ‘Una “prima” mondiale a Venezia: la *Carriera del libertino* di Stravinski accolto con successo al festival musicale’.

<sup>27</sup> Guido Pannain, ‘Alla “Fenice” per il Festival veneziano della musica: *La carriera del libertino* non darà gloria a Stravinsky’, *Il tempo* (12 September 1951).

<sup>28</sup> T.W. Adorno, ‘Bourgeois Opera’ (1955), reprinted in translation in David Levin, ed., *Opera Through Other Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 25–43, here 41.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

economic hardship, crisis of production, even of reception'.<sup>30</sup> The real reason for the omission, Pugliese claimed, came from the disorder of the institution itself.

Furthermore, he noted that although the Venice festival began in the midst of opera crisis, such perceptions had only heightened in the war's aftermath. The reasons given here and elsewhere for the renewed postwar opera crisis were those that had haunted the genre since the previous century: the financial restrictions of production, the changing structures of opera houses and festivals, and the rise of new mass entertainments.

The lugubrious rhetoric of 1951 chimed in particular with that of the 1920s and 30s, a period also rife with discussions of 'opera crisis'. Many of the critics at the premiere of *The Rake* had been part of this earlier discussion; Labroca, for example, claimed that Verdi was the only opera composer worth exalting, while 'Verismo opera was like an oil slick that spread all over Italy, saving only a handful of operas among all that were produced in Italy between 1880 and the present day'.<sup>31</sup> Leading figures of the culture of revivalism, namely Gabriele D'Annunzio and the Venetian Gian Francesco Malipiero, sought to counteract this lack of perceived mantle bearers since Verdi by rediscovering earlier Italian—and especially Venetian—opera.<sup>32</sup> Monteverdi and Venice were rewritten as the progenitors of Italian opera, regardless of the importance of the Florentine Camerata, or of Jacopo Peri and Emilio de' Cavalieri. This repositioning of Venice made it central to twentieth-century projects of recuperation and conservation, as well as to the debate about the status of opera in the present.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding these projects of musical revival earlier in the century, after the war, operas by Rossini and early Verdi—to name but two—were also being reheard for the first time in many decades. A survey of La Fenice's programming in the decade

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<sup>30</sup> 'Sentimmo parlare di difficoltà economiche, di crisi di produzione, di risposta persino'; Giuseppe Pugliese, 'Opere opere opere opere opere opere opere per il Festival di Venezia', *La Scala* (15 March 1951), 31-33, here 32.

<sup>31</sup> 'Il melodramma verista fu come una macchia d'olio che si spandette per tutta l'Italia salvando solo pochissime opere tra quelle che furono prodotte in Italia tra il 1880 e i nostri giorni'; Mario Labroca, 'Vita e musica nell'Italia nuova', *La rassegna musicale* 7 (1932), 39-43, here 39.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the recuperative work done under the Fascist regime, see Andrew Dell'Antonio, 'Il divino Claudio: Monteverdi and Lyric Nostalgia in Fascist Italy', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8/3 (November 1996), 271-84.

<sup>33</sup> Much of this conservative modernist philological work was made possible by the availability of sources held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice. Fiamma Nicolodi has written about the way in which modern Italian composers' references to the past have created a specifically Italian modernism, in *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista* (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1984), 243.

or so prior to the premiere of *The Rake* shows that whereas the wartime period was dominated by middle-period Verdi and Puccini, Wagner and Strauss, and modern Italian composers such as Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, Ildebrando Pizzetti and Pietro Mascagni, the rest of the decade saw not only less German and more French music, but also a flourishing of productions of earlier Italian composers: Donizetti, Rossini, Bellini and Monteverdi.<sup>34</sup> Stravinsky's opera thus contributed to the salvaging of a past that had until recently been forgotten, but one that was increasingly being revived and reincarnated in collective memory. A shift that had begun over a hundred years earlier, in opera house repertoires in Italy and elsewhere, of a move away from emphasis on new works to revivals of older classics, was intensifying in the postwar period.<sup>35</sup> This operatic recycling was in part the result of the financially-straitened times—premieres were risky enterprises for cash-strapped opera houses—but venues such as La Fenice had also become a place of mediation of the past, a site of memory, in a time otherwise more concerned with preparing for the future.<sup>36</sup>

If postwar operatic culture was thus involved in a collective stock-take, broader social debate was more generally concerned with what the rest of the decade might hold. After the collapse of the Fascist regime and the Allied occupation that followed, widespread repudiation of the immediate past became a central strategy of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) government. The period since the war had been a critical moment for the politics of remembering. The DC had been keen to avoid the denazification processes that Germany had undergone, knowing that many of their personnel, as well as many of their middle class supporters, were implicated in the Fascist regime. Conversely, the ongoing cogency of the Resistance and Communist Left was its emphasis on remembering recent events.<sup>37</sup>

The decisive 1948 elections brought these tensions to the fore. Rather than

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<sup>34</sup> For more on La Fenice programming, see Girardi and Rossi, *Il teatro la Fenice*, vol. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Emanuele Senici claims that this shift to a reliance on older works began with the repetition of Rossini's operas in the 1820s; see Senici, "Ferrea e tenace memoria": la pratica rossiniana dell'autoimprestito nel discorso dei contemporanei', *Philomusica on-line* 9/1 (2010; accessed 7 August 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Fearn also suggests that the conservative programming was in part due to the fact that in the immediate postwar period, a large proportion of opera audiences were Allied troops, who were not expected to appreciate anything other than the popular classics; in Fearn, *Italian Opera Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1998), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Judt discusses the fact that the European Left saw remembering the recent past as being antifascist, whereas being rightwing was to forget; see *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 204.



insist on a proper administrative purge, which would have pushed the DC into a corner, the Partito Comunista Italiana (PCI) instead invited their opponents to form a government—a gesture they hoped would result in their own inclusion. This misjudgement was the PCI's undoing: they forsook their project of remembering for political power.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the election, the PCI was excluded from government, and the personnel of bureaucracy, law, the police and the army stayed similar to the situation under Fascism.<sup>39</sup> If the postwar age was thus a mixture of political pragmatics and dogmatic historical materialism—of progress at the expense of the past—the situation within cultural politics was more complicated. Musical discourse, in particular, was performing Benjamin's angel of history: moving into the future, but looking ever backwards as it did so.<sup>40</sup>

Moments of political crisis in Venice had long provoked societal self-examinations of musical culture: from *La gazzetta di Venezia's* promotion of a concert society to elevate the musical life of the city in the aftermath of the Risorgimento, to the Fascists' celebration of Venetian musical life during World War Two. And now, as G.F. Malipiero wrote, 'After the Second World War, Venice came to be found intact physically but not spiritually': reconstruction was to be effected through a reassertion of Venetian music culture.<sup>41</sup> Thus cultural recuperation took the place of architectural rebuilding and lack of *epurazione*, a counterpoint to the widespread political and administrative continuity.

Aside from personnel statistics, effacing the past was also directed more generally at perceptions of national failure at the end of the war and the collapse of the regime (1943-45). As the famous philologist and linguist Fernando Palazzi wrote:

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<sup>38</sup> This undoing of the PCI is discussed further in Perry Anderson, *The New Old World* (London: Verso, 2009), 332-33.

<sup>39</sup> For statistics and analyses of the degree of postwar continuity at an administrative level, see Elena Aga-Rossi, *L'Italia nella sconfitta: politica interna e situazione internazionale durante la seconda guerra mondiale* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1985), 125-44; Vezio Crisafulli, 'La continuità dello stato', *Rivista di diritto internazionale* 47 (1964), 365-408; and Marcello Flores, 'L'epurazione', in AA. VV., *L'Italia dalla liberazione alla repubblica* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977). For a broader history of this moment, see Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della repubblica: scritti sul fascismo, antifascismo e continuità dello stato* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), 132-40.

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 245-55, here 249.

<sup>41</sup> 'Finita la seconda guerra, Venezia venne a trovarsi intatta materialmente ma non spiritualmente'; in Gian Francesco Malipiero, 'In difesa dell'arte musicale: Venezia città polare', originally in *Il mattino di Roma* 2/11 (13 January 1948); reprinted in Maria Teresa Muraro, ed., *Malipiero: scrittura e critica* (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 164-67, here 166.

There are so many good reasons to forget. I want monarchists to remember no more that they were once monarchist and Fascists that they were Fascist. I also want Republicans to forget that they voted republican ... I would like this total amnesia to make everybody forget everything, even the *paese* from which we come.<sup>42</sup>

Such amnesia was important if the nation was to move on from the labyrinthine infrastructure left by Fascism. This forgetting was further evidenced by the fact that few large-scale monuments were erected after World War Two (especially compared to after the First World War).<sup>43</sup> But there remained physical continuity with the past: the distinctively Fascist 1932 facade for the Palazzo dell'Esposizione at the Biennale remained standing after the war. Thus the importance of forgetting postwar was both personal and collective: on the one hand of people's own involvement with the regime, but on the other of the nation's recent history—not only of the experiences of the *ventennio*, but also of broader social and political failures since the Risorgimento. As Italo Calvino wrote, echoing Palazzi's invocation of total amnesia, 'the rejection of a society that had produced Fascism led us to dream of revolution which would take off from a *tabula rasa*'.<sup>44</sup>

## Classic sounds

Within this broader culture of opera crisis and political continuity, the unease stirred by *The Rake* among its first listeners is perhaps not so unexpected. Yet rather than dismiss it as reminiscent of earlier spectacles, critics sought to understand the opera on its own terms, and as exemplary of their present predicament. A series of crisis-laden questions were posed: was the opera art or a joke, skilled craft or the sign of creative aridity, stylistic regression or a modern parody? There were also overt political connotations: did Stravinsky's neoclassicism make him daringly modernist or a reactionary, conservative or simply objective? The most important and oft-repeated question was whether *The Rake* represented the death knell of opera, or instead opened up a new trajectory; some called it an 'epilogue' in the history of opera, while others

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<sup>42</sup> Fernando Palazzi, 'Amnistia e amnesia', *Nuovo corriere della sera* (21 June 1946); quoted and translated in Dondi, 'The Fascist Mentality after Fascism', 151.

<sup>43</sup> See Mario Isnenghi, *Le guerre degli italiani. Parole, immagini, ricordi 1848-1945* (Milan: Il Mulino, 1989), 350-51.

<sup>44</sup> 'il rifiuto della società che aveva prodotto il fascismo ci aveva portato a sognare una rivoluzione che partisse da una *tabula rasa*'; Italo Calvino, in an interview in Ettore Albertoni, Ezio Antonini and Renato Palmieri, eds., *La generazione degli anni difficili* (Bari: Laterza, 1962), 79.

said that it was worth the reputedly huge sum spent if it presented a way out of crisis. Several critics suggested the very idea of ‘modern opera’ was a contradiction in terms, opera being by this point inherently a relic of the past.<sup>45</sup> One summarised thus,

Bisogna dire che chi si attendeva qualcosa di nuovo, un responso decisivo o per lo meno indicativo circa la morte o la rinascita del melodramma, da questa ultima fatica di Stravinsky—onesta, convinta fatica di un musicista giunto al sommo dell’esperienza—è rimasto certamente deluso ... Ma, ripetiamo, se da *The Rake’s Progress* qualcuno si attendeva una risposta all’interrogativo ‘Sarà questo il melodramma di domani?’, la risposta non può essere che negativa.<sup>46</sup>

[It must be said that those who expected something new, a decisive response or one that was at least indicative regarding the death and rebirth of opera, from this latest work by Stravinsky—who expected a work of honesty and conviction from a composer at the peak of his power—were certainly disappointed ... If asked whether this will be the opera of tomorrow, the reply could only be negative.]

The aesthetic judgment of *The Rake* bore not only the weight of contemporary crisis, but also of the entire beleaguered operatic tradition. Many claimed the answer as to whether Stravinsky had provided a new direction for operatic pursuits would inevitably be left to posterity, for as one put it, ‘The crises, preoccupations, uncertainties and suspicions surrounding opera have for many of us musicians taken away the immediacy and freshness of the music’.<sup>47</sup> But one strand of hope was provided by the night of the premiere itself: amid a perceived stagnation of operatic production, dwindling audiences and usurpation by mass media, the hype of the event suggested a lingering degree of vitality: ‘popular interest in music theatre, then, has not been extinguished; people are not moved and excited solely by a film premiere or sporting event—they still believe in opera, they believe in music, and this, we would say, is both positive and reassuring’.<sup>48</sup> The premiere was thus not just an echo of grand

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Ma se io debba considerare il melodramma in rapporto a questo nostro tempo, alla vita che noi viviamo, e in rapporto a quelle che credo possano essere le nostre esigenze [...] dico che il melodramma è oggi un assurdo’ (But if I consider opera in relation to our own time, to the life we live, and in relation to those which I believe to be our needs [...] I say that opera today is an absurdity); Ildebrando Pizzetti, ‘Parere sul melodramma’, *Ulisse* 5/14 (April 1951), 151-53, here 151.

<sup>46</sup> Nordio, ‘Una prima mondiale a “La Fenice” di Venezia: *La carriera del libertino*, di Stravinsky, opera moderna ispirata al Settecento’, *Il popolo nuovo* (12 September 1951).

<sup>47</sup> ‘La crisi del melodramma, le preoccupazioni, le incertezze, i sospetti hanno tolto a molti di noi, musicisti, la immediatezza e la freschezza nel percepire la musica’; Glinski, ‘Ancora di Stravinsky’.

<sup>48</sup> ‘l’interesse per il teatro musicale, dunque, non s’è estinto, la gente non si muove e non si commuove soltanto per una prima cinematografica o per una gara sportiva; crede ancora nell’opera

opera, but for some a challenge to modern spectacle; another critic concurred, claiming that at the premiere were ‘Magnesium lighting, filming, loudspeakers, pageantry and excitement which until yesterday belonged only to a gala evening at the cinema’.<sup>49</sup>

This abiding sense of hope pervaded press reports. For all the apocalyptic pronouncements circulating in public debate, the impression from the reception is just how productive the perception of crisis was. New concepts were being formed and hardening in response to *The Rake’s* premiere: of a neo-formalism, organicism, ‘nuova obbiettività’ and eclecticism. These were being simultaneously discussed and defined in contemporary journals, often by the same critics writing of the premiere. A search for form and order was perceived to be the principal concern of contemporary music;<sup>50</sup> order was deemed necessary in the aftermath of war and in the face of manifold musical crises. More specifically, issues of form were being reconsidered in light of the continuing debate over neoclassicism and dodecaphony (both had prewar continuity). If some doubted the continuing efficacy of neoclassicism, they at least acknowledged that Stravinsky’s return to the music of earlier centuries had been part of his quest for a renewed sense of form.

The very idea of crisis was perceived to be the result of an increasingly fragmented and divided world: as one critic wrote, ‘Today men dream of a return to form, seeking, as it were, to transcend themselves, through proportions, edges, grafts’.<sup>51</sup> Stravinsky’s opera—the critic claimed—thus sought both to harness and control crisis: ‘To have written an opera in classical form has meant, for Stravinsky, bringing the laws of an “objective” world, a crystalline order, to the centre of one of

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lirica, crede nella musica e, questo, dicevamo è un elemento positivo e confortante’; Sandro Carletti, ‘Strawinski (in grande stile) e Verdi (in economia) al Festival di Venezia’, *Rassegna dello spettacolo* (September-October 1951), 33-35, here 34.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Lampi al magnesio, riprese cinematografiche, altoparlanti, sfarzo ed eccitazione quali fino a ieri appartenevano solo alle grandi serate del cinema’; Fernando L. Lunghi, ‘In una grandiose cornice la “prima” mondiale di Strawinsky alla Fenice: la “carriera di un libertino” opera dalle idee non create’, *Il giornale d’Italia* (13 September 1951).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Brunello Rondi, ‘“Nuova obbiettività” e novità umana nella musica del novecento’, *Diapason* 9-10 (1952), 5-8.

<sup>51</sup> ‘L’uomo di oggi sogna un ritorno alla forma, cerca cioè d’essere riconsegnato, attraverso proporzioni, spigoli, innesti’; Rondi, ‘Dopo *The Rake’s Progress* di Strawinskij: il problema dell’opera oggi’, *Fiera letteraria* (30 September 1951).

the most hazardous and compromising experiences of our time'.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, this reflection of crisis was to be found in the music, as another noted: '*The Rake's Progress* appears to us a true reflection of the crisis, when it is analysed in the notes that characterise it', that is, in its portrayal of the musical past.<sup>53</sup>

The reception was thus premised on contemporary perceptions of cultural malaise, an ambiguous situation that *The Rake* was seen to both exemplify and exacerbate. The perplexity instilled by the opera was considered the result, somewhat paradoxically, of its fragmented and eclectic portrayal of the past (putting 'objects' on display), and its effacement of the present through an idealised retreat or 'refuge' into history. As one critic noted,

L'angoscia di un'età insoddisfatta come il novecento, le crisi economiche, politiche, artistiche, gli urli bestiali delle masse, le guerre disastrose, il caos che cominciò a turbinare dietro le raffinate mollezze degli esteti decadenti, quanto di innaturale e di inumano, di bestiale e di primitivo il nostro secolo riveste, tutto ciò prima ancora che si verificasse e prendesse consistenza storica era già divenuto materia 'poetica' nella sconcertante ispirazione di Stravinsky.<sup>54</sup>

[The anguish of an age discontented like the twentieth century, with its economic, political and artistic crises, accompanied by the bestial cries of the masses, its disastrous wars ... our age composed of so much that is unnatural and inhuman, that is primitive and bestial, all of this, even before it had been verified and established as history, has already become a source of 'poetic' material and disconcerting inspiration for Stravinsky.]

In other words, *The Rake's* retreat into history, prompted by and instigating a rhetoric of crisis, became a disconcerting prophecy of an increasingly embalmed music culture. As the subtitle of another article stated, 'The opera reflects the crisis within modern

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<sup>52</sup> 'Aver scritto un melodramma di modulo classico ha significato per Stravinsky portare le leggi di un mondo "obbiettivo", di un cristallino ordine, nel centro della più rischiosa e compromettente esperienza del nostro tempo'; *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> 'Specchio fedele della crisi ci appare *The Rake's Progress*, quando sia analizzata nelle note che la caratterizzano'; Giuseppe M. Pilo, 'Trionfa Stravinsky in un'indimenticabile serata: *The Rake's Progress* in "prima mondiale" alla Fenice', *Il popolo del Veneto* (14 September 1951). This complicates Taruskin's suggestion that *The Rake* appears to us *now* 'as consciousness of art in crisis', but at the time 'seemed the product of a composer blissfully out of touch with the contemporary requirements of his art'; Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 117.

<sup>54</sup> Fabbro, 'Una prima assoluta al Festival di Venezia'.

society, torn apart as it is by agonising spiritual conflicts and longing to take refuge in memories of a happier past'.<sup>55</sup>

If disintegration and fragmentation were symptomatic of contemporary crisis, this situation made a semblance of organicism an ever-more desirable ideal—something deemed salvageable from this idea of 'a happier past'. As one commentator noted: 'In the contemporary era, the crisis of opera is primarily a crisis of organicism, from the extreme decline of relationships to the breakdown of voices and the withering of song, if by song is meant commitment and dedication, and not ultimately illusion'.<sup>56</sup> It was against such ideals that *The Rake* was judged, the concatenation of past styles a refraction of such fragmentation. The debate was framed in the terms of broader debate as a 'nuova obbiettività' and crisis of existentialism.<sup>57</sup> Such concerns were what distinguished postwar music from its predecessors. The new objectivity was a preoccupation, above all, with the 'victorious liquidation of romantic subjectivism, that is truly and profoundly the celebrated death of individualism'.<sup>58</sup> This 'death' was the determining factor of contemporary cultural crisis. These were the terms employed in the specifics of *The Rake's* reception: many saw Stravinsky's fractured portrayal of music history as the subjection of his compositional subjectivity to the objective presentation of 'given material'.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth pausing here to investigate how exactly discussion of this 'given material' was framed in the reception. Critics referred to Stravinsky as an artisan, with the historicist styling of *The Rake* as 'comparable to a sack of shavings from the

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<sup>55</sup> 'L'opera rispecchia la crisi della società odierna, dilaniata da angosciosi conflitti spirituali, anelante a rifugiarsi nel ricordo di un passato ritenuto felice'; Pilo, 'Trionfa Stravinsky in un'indimenticabile serata: *The Rake's Progress* in "prima mondiale" alla Fenice'.

<sup>56</sup> 'Nell'epoca contemporanea la crisi del melodramma è anzitutto una crisi di organicità, caduta estrema di rapporti, sfaldarsi di "voci", deperire del canto; se il canto è dedizione, oggetto che si forma e si offre, non "ultima illusione"; Rondi, 'Dopo *The Rake's Progress* di Strawinskij: il problema dell'opera oggi'.

<sup>57</sup> On existentialism in Italian cultural debate at this time, see Pascale Budillon Puma, *La Biennale di Venezia: dalla guerra alla crisi, 1948-68* (Bari: Palomar, 1995), 25-26.

<sup>58</sup> 'vittoriosa liquidazione del soggettivismo romantico, è veramente e profondamente la celebrata morte dell'individualismo'. Furthermore, 'questa crisi è il "pathos" del nostro tempo, è il sentimento, più profondo, sotto certi aspetti, di quello della musica romantica' (this crisis is the 'pathos' of our time, it is the feeling, profounder, in some respects, to that of romantic music); Rondi, "'Nuova obbiettività" e novità umana nella musica del novecento', both 6.

<sup>59</sup> As one put it, the style 'arbitrariamente definiti "neoclassici", che consiste in un geniale rifacimento stilistico di musica bell'e fatta, considerata da lui e adoperata come semplice "materiale" (arbitrarily defined as 'neoclassical', it consists of a brilliant stylistic remake of ready-made music, considered and worked by him simply as 'material'); Beniamino Del Fabbro, 'Al Festival della musica contemporanea: trionfo di Strawinsky a Venezia con la *carriera di un libertino*', *Il nuovo corriere* (12 September 1951).

restoration of antique furniture’;<sup>60</sup> or, as another put it, Stravinsky was a ‘furniture manufacturer’ crafting pastiche pieces from previous styles.<sup>61</sup> But more than merely aesthetically pleasing, these revenants of a musical past were, many noted, once vehicles of great emotional power, now reduced to inexpressive ‘fossili’. The language of the reviews was littered with repeated allusions to desiccation, coldness and marmoreal hardness: ‘a detachment, a contemplation, a cold yearning’.<sup>62</sup> One critic claimed that, ‘all these elements are emptied by Stravinsky of their expressive content and exhibited as the stuff of a fabulous booty’;<sup>63</sup> another that,

Strawinsky, nel citare, rifà, e nel rifare imbalsama, isterilisce, scheletrizza, quegli elementi melodici, armonici e ritmici. Sembra essersi tuffato nella storia della musica come in un mucchio di rottami; pesca, da quel mucchio, i “pezzi”) che gli occorrono. Il considera con l’occhio dell’archeologo che esamina una serie di fossili. Un tempo quei fossili manifestarono straordinarie cariche d’espressione, di quell’espressione che Strawinsky dichiara di odiare o perlomeno di non perseguire furono creature vive, diciamo noi. Ora sono pezzi da museo.<sup>64</sup>

[Stravinsky, in quoting, refers back, and in referring he embalms and sterilises, making skeletons of the musical elements of melody, harmony and rhythm. He seems to have plunged into musical history as into a scrap heap; he fishes from the heap the ‘pieces’ he needs, considering them with the eye of an archaeologist examining a series of fossils. At one time these fossils manifested extraordinary levels of expression—of the expression that Stravinsky declared he loathed or wished to avoid—and we would say seemed to be living creatures. Now they are museum pieces.]

The language employed here, of skeletons, fossils and museum pieces, takes us back to the contemporary vocabulary of opera crisis. Thus the cold objectivity of Stravinsky’s compositional style reinforced the notion of *The Rake* as an opera

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<sup>60</sup> ‘paragonabile ad un sacco di trucioli ricavati dal restauro di antichi mobili’; Renzo Rossellini, ‘Un grande avvenimento musicale: la prima di Strawinsky’, *Il messaggero di roma* (12 September 1951).

<sup>61</sup> ‘Strawinsky lavora davvero come certi mobiliери di lusso’; ‘In “prima” mondiale a Venezia: *La carriera del libertino* di Strawinsky’, *Il mattino dell’Italia centrale* (12 September 1951).

<sup>62</sup> ‘Un distacco, una contemplazione, un freddo vagheggiamento’; Emilio Radius, ‘La prima notte del Don Giovanni di Strawinsky’, *L’Europeo* (23 September 1951).

<sup>63</sup> ‘tutti questi elementi vengono svuotati da Strawinski del loro contenuto espressivo ed esposti come roba di un favoloso bottino’; Radius, ‘La sera dell’11 settembre si darà a Venezia la più importante opera della mia vita, ha detto l’autore’, *L’Europeo* (9 September 1951). Similarly another critic wrote: ‘Un ritorno a forme del passato? Sì, ma col gusto di un collezionista’ (A return to the past? Yes, but with the taste of a collector); Pannain, ‘Alla “Fenice” per il Festival veneziano della musica: *La carriera del libertino* non darà gloria a Strawinsky’.

<sup>64</sup> Teodoro Celli, ‘Il mondo delle sette note mobilitato a Venezia: Strawinsky ha lanciato il messaggio del suo “libertino”’, *Corriere Lombardo* (12 September 1951).

museum on display. As one critic put it, the opera was thus ‘un settecento da museo, che ha qualcosa di macabro’ (an eighteenth-century museum, which has something of the macabre).<sup>65</sup> Its sepulchral aura lay not only in its portrayal of the death of subjectivity, but also in the death of opera itself. Adorno had previously spoken of Stravinsky’s neoclassicism as representing an ‘accumulation of musical merchandise’, but what is especially marked in the reviews of *The Rake* is the way these souvenirs were seen as having their original emotional resonance expunged for the purposes of museographic display.<sup>66</sup> This also reinforced Venice as an appropriate locale: *The Rake* ‘has found its natural theatre in the city of water and stone, where the eighteenth century is still alive, almost embalmed in its architectural forms’.<sup>67</sup> The question remained, then—for the city and the opera—of the place of this museum culture in a forward-looking society.

### Modernistic metamorphosis

On the one hand, listening to the opera purely as a display case of classic sounds being re-enlivened from the dead—a ‘sfilata di scheletri musicali’ (parade of musical skeletons)<sup>68</sup>—played to a pervasive sense of opera crisis; on the other, the emphasis on their ‘ghostly’ re-enactment within the framework of a new, *modern* opera turned it into the most timely work imaginable. The objectively modernist lens on the past in fact made the opera representative of the multifaceted contemporary crisis. Even the feeling of perplexity the opera induced was perceived as timely: ‘it is perplexity of a similar nature to that which immediately takes hold of those who contemplate

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<sup>65</sup> Pugliese, ‘*The Rake’s Progress* al Festival di musica contemporanea: è rimasto selvaggio il cicisbeo di Strawinski’, *Illustrazione del popolo* (20-26 September 1951).

<sup>66</sup> Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006 [1947]), 149. Adorno also labelled the music’s expressionless quality as betraying a ‘cool objectivity’ (*Sachlichkeit*) in ‘Stravinsky: A Dialectical Portrait’, rept. in Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2002 [1963]), 145-75, here 149. He also noted that by the mid-1950s, ‘opera corresponds to a great extent to the museum’, in ‘Bourgeois Opera’, 41. For a theorisation of the souvenir, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1984). For a fascinating discussion of metaphors of death and the souvenir in *The Rake*, see Heather Wiebe, ‘*The Rake’s Progress* as Opera Museum’, *The Opera Quarterly* 25/1-2 (2010), 6-27.

<sup>67</sup> ‘ha trovato il suo naturale teatro nella città d’acqua e di pietra, in questa Venezia ove il Settecento è ancora vivo, quasi imbalsamato nelle sue forme architettoniche’; Del Fabbro, ‘Al Festival della musica contemporanea: trionfo di Strawinsky a Venezia con la *carriera di un libertino*’.

<sup>68</sup> Celli, ‘Il mondo delle sette note mobilitato a Venezia: Strawinsky ha lanciata il messaggio del suo “libertino”’.



contemporary society with a critical eye'.<sup>69</sup> Emphasis on *The Rake's* distinctively Stravinskian elements was thus part of a rhetorical move to situate the work in the present, despite its evocations of the past. As Massimo Mila wrote in his 1951 guide to the opera, 'Through the evocation of past styles, it is a modern man who speaks, and he says things that only in this century we can perceive; these styles are the object of a yearning which requires an emotional detachment, a distinction between the artist of today and the old models'.<sup>70</sup>

The modern nature of *The Rake* was enforced above all through notions of 'eclecticism' and 'hybridity' as self-consciously stylistic traits.<sup>71</sup> Rather than simply representative of a museum, Stravinsky's deliberate fragmentation of music history gave the opera its own *tinta*. The work was in many ways a modernist collage, one that retained an originality despite its reliance on pre-existent material.<sup>72</sup> This sense of eclecticism instilled by the mimicry of older music had two effects: on the one hand—to borrow from Paul Ricoeur—it created a sense of distance essential to *The Rake's* broader purposes of storytelling and narrativity.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the citations formed an accumulation of past artefacts, which in their agglomeration evinced a sense of unmoored sounds that continually disrupt the sense of historical linearity. The gestures to the past cut across each other and disrupted the impression of 'progress' or unfolding. In a sense, *The Rake* echoes the kind of dual history that Roland Barthes

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<sup>69</sup> 'è perplessità di natura analoga a quella che immediatamente si impadronisce di chi contempi con occhio critico la società contemporanea'; Pilo, 'Trionfa Strawinsky in un'indimenticabile serata: *The Rake's Progress* in "prima mondiale" alla Fenice'.

<sup>70</sup> 'Attraverso la rievocazione di stili del passato, è un uomo moderno che parla, e dice cose che soltanto in questo secolo si possono concepire; quegli stili sono oggetto d'un vagheggiamento affettivo che presuppone un distacco, una distinzione tra l'artista d'oggi ed il modello antico'; Mila, 'Guida alla *Carriera del libertino*', in Mila, *Compagno Stravinsky* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 84.

Similarly, Celli claimed that 'questa opera di innocente apparenza settecentesca, è ben appartenente, invece, alla nostra travagliata età' (this opera of innocent eighteenth-century appearance, is very much belonging, instead, to our trouble-afflicted age); Celli, "Il sofà delle muse": il libertino di Strawinsky ha sposato la donna barbata', *Oggi* 7/38 (20 September 1951), 34.

<sup>71</sup> As one critic claimed, 'il movente dell'effettivo eclettismo è ben lontano da quello del puro gioco o della stanchezza inventiva' (the motive of effective eclecticism is a far cry from that of pure play or of inventive fatigue); Emilia Zanetti, '*The Rake's Progress* di Strawinski al Festival musicale: la maestria risolta in semplicità', *Fiera letteraria* (16 September 1951). The contemporary notion of hybridity was outlined in Roman Vlad, 'Panorama espressivo della musica contemporanea', *Ulisse* 5/14 (1951), 132-37.

<sup>72</sup> As Glenn Watkins puts it, modernist collage 'has been likened to a curio cabinet, where unrelated objects are placed together and achieve cohesion through arrangement and proximity'; Watkins, *Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernists* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Ricoeur theorised that the use of a past tense in literature provides a sense of distance vital to the art of narration; see Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 2, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

famously wrote about in *S/Z*: the critique of a Hegelian view of progress (a progress that ultimately collapses); but also a history of repetition, of progress thwarted before it even gets off the ground.<sup>74</sup>

This duality of old and new was repeatedly described in the reviews as a ‘dialectic’, the resultant sound world of Stravinsky’s opera a ‘synthesis’.<sup>75</sup> The constituent parts of this dialectic were convention and originality; markers of the latter were singled out for praise, seen as having escaped the burden of the former.<sup>76</sup> The emphasis on the modern also seemed to assuage guilt at the collective enjoyment of past sounds, again to sublimate the music into something more aesthetically valid.<sup>77</sup> And if the opera was fully modern, that also made it an important contribution to the troubled genre. Aside from references to the ‘problem of opera’, there was repeated emphasis on *The Rake* being a ‘true’ opera, and defense of its generic allusions.<sup>78</sup> At the centre of this dialectic was thus a sense of the music evoking the past—whether through direct quotation or oblique allusion—but also Stravinsky’s role in creating that history. Although there can be no musical past tense *per se*, the historicity of the opera’s sound world, achieved through convention and citation, reinforced an awareness of the gap between ‘then’ and ‘now’.<sup>79</sup> Again this insinuated the timeliness of the opera—as a new work reliant on the museographic canon of operatic history.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> In a discussion of the readerly, Roland Barthes draws a musical analogy: that reading, like listening, is characterised by moving forwards and backwards, through continuities and discontinuities. As he says, ‘The classic text, therefore, is actually tabular (and not linear), but its tabularity is vectorized, it follows a logico-temporal order’; in Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974 [1973]), 30.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Piovesan, ‘Ritorno di Strawinsky’, *Radiocorriere* (9-15 September 1951). Another called it ‘a synthesis of heterogeneity’; in Mario Medici, ‘Si è aperto il Festival della musica: *La carriera del libertino* diretta da Strawinsky a Venezia’, *Il giornale dell’Emilia* (12 September 1951).

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Glinski, ‘Ancora di Strawinsky’; Della Corte, ‘*La carriera d’un libertino*’, *La nuova stampa* (12 September 1951); and Alceo Toni, ‘*La carriera di un dissoluto*: Strawinsky è ammasso di paccottiglia musicale’, *Meridiano d’Italia* (23 September 1951).

<sup>77</sup> For an authoritative account of the relationship between sublimation and modernism, see Christopher Chowrimootoo, ‘Bourgeois Opera: *Death in Venice* and the Aesthetics of Sublimation’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22/2 (2010), 175-216.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Del Fabbro, ‘Carattere del XIV Festival di musica a Venezia’, *Via* 10 (October 1951), 17; Abbiati, ‘Una “prima” mondiale a Venezia: la *Carriera del libertino* di Strawinski accolta con successo al Festival musicale’; and Procida, ‘Il messaggio di Strawinsky e il suo *Rake’s Progress*’.

<sup>79</sup> Carolyn Abbate discusses the idea of a musical past tense, and citations of ‘an artifact from the past’ as instilling a sense of ‘pastness’, in Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 53-54.

<sup>80</sup> One critic claimed the opera was in this sense part of a broader trajectory of operas that returned to those of the past, from Alfredo Casella’s *La donna serpente* (1932) to G. F. Malipiero’s *L’allegra brigata* (1943); Confalonieri, ‘*La carriera del libertino* alla Fenice: non sempre il diavolo trova da far bene’, *Il tempo do Milano* (12 September 1951). A notable omission in the reception of *The Rake* is an engagement with Casella’s ideas on neoclassicism, which had been prominent in musical discourse

Attempts at sublimating pleasing music, and the renewed sense of disjuncture between past and present, applied in particular to Anne. She is the character most framed by operatic convention, after all. Act 1 scene 3 serves as a vehicle for her performance, and correspondingly follows the traditional scheme of introduction, recitative and aria, followed by *tempo di mezzo* and cabaletta. For much of this section the purpose seems to be vocal display for its own sake—something typical of early nineteenth-century opera, but also a stylisation previously unheard in Stravinsky’s music. The closing cabaletta is in a traditional two-verse form, with the reprisal of material principally a dramatic embellishment of that of the first section. The textures throughout are predominantly of a nineteenth-century Italian operatic character, recalling the sound world of Rossini, and also of early Verdi. The opening gestures, with their descending triplet figures, are typically Rossinian (see Musical Example 1). However, Anne’s first phrase (‘I go, I go to him’) immediately recalls Mozart. Yet things are quickly not what they seem: as Anne’s vocal part gets under way, phrases curtail with idiosyncratic Stravinskian intervallic patterns (see Musical Example 2), before such flashes of ‘originality’ are eradicated by further Mozartian gestures.

The overriding impression is that conventionality triumphs, with a rousing conclusion to Anne’s final high C—a characteristically nineteenth-century gesture. Not only is this an obvious throwback to an earlier operatic idiom, but it also jars with the music heard in *The Rake* thus far. It feels at a remove from the melodically and vocally restrained, more Baroque lines of the earlier parts of the opera. Elisabeth Schwarzkopf reinforced these nineteenth-century resonances in her portrayal of Anne, with her larger, more traditionally operatic voice than the part had been intended for (and subsequent productions have tended to use).<sup>81</sup> Thus despite sounding in some ways the most vocally free of the characters, Anne is in a sense the most curbed by conventional idioms (of nineteenth-century opera, gendered portrayal, the pastoral). What is more, the moment highlighted a discrepancy between audience and critics—

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during the Fascist period. This is perhaps in part because Casella had drawn a direct correlation between musical neoclassicism and Fascism, arguing that their inherent similarity resided in a mutual desire for order and reactionary revolution. Although left inexplicit, this could be a reason some saw Stravinsky’s opera as politically reactionary.

<sup>81</sup> This sense of out-of-placeness is reiterated by the fact that the high C was W. H. Auden’s contribution: Stravinsky originally wrote the C an octave lower. See, Mendelson, *Libretti and Other Dramatic Writings by W.H. Auden, 1939-1973*, 592. For further discussion of this, see Wiebe, ‘*The Rake’s Progress* as Opera Museum’.

### CABALETTA

Fl. I, II  $\text{♩} = 126$   
 Fag. I, II  
 Tr. I in B♭  
 Cor. I, II in F  
 I  
 VI  
 II  
 Vle.  
 Vc.  
 Cb.

Musical Example 1: *The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky.

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Ob. I, II  
 Fag. I, II  
 A.  
 I  
 VI  
 II  
 Vle.  
 Vc.  
 Cb.

hurt if love be love, it will not

Musical Example 2: *The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky.

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something that was forming part of a more general trend, one exacerbated, as we shall see, by developments in contemporary radio culture. While critics battled over whether the cabaletta displayed a parodic portrayal of the past or an easy conventionality, the audience responded as if they were at a Rossini opera. Listening to the recording of the premiere, the high C can be heard to prompt the loudest moment of applause thus far. In other words, the moment of supposed heightened conventionality elicited a conventional response: as if the audience were suddenly returned to a normal night at the opera.

Ironically, many critics pinpointed the moment most blatantly about death—the cemetery scene (Act 3, Scene 2), in which Nick Shadow’s devilish alter ego is revealed—as one of the most *modern* moments in the opera. Again ideas of deadness and the sepulchral were suggestive of a certain timeliness—an impression only enhanced by the Stravinskian scoring. Critics likened the pivotal card game to decide Tom’s fate to the game-playing Stravinsky enjoyed with the references to the past. Such recourse to the ludic was one of the main ways of making sense of the opera’s modern aspects, and also of channelling the references to the past into a modern framework. Stravinsky’s compositional style was continually assessed to be one of ironic detachment, as a modernist joke. There were repeated references to ‘pranks’, ‘tricks’ and ‘game-playing’ when ‘l’arte non è indubbiamente un gioco’ (art is undoubtedly not a game).<sup>82</sup> A few critics were quick to take umbrage at what they saw as a lack of sincerity. But if that troubled some, for others it could at least be co-opted into the modernist rehabilitation. Rather more problematic was the overriding mechanical style that reinforced the sense of distance. While the majority saw such mechanicity as part of the modernist framing of past sounds, others remained simply disconcerted by the coldness of Stravinsky’s mechanistic idiolect.

These preoccupations with form and order, a renewed objectivity and the modernist lens on the past provided by a self-consciously eclectic style, were also used either to defend or critique the postwar survival of neoclassicism in response to the

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<sup>82</sup> Procida, ‘Una prima mondiale di eccezione: *La carriera del libertino* di Igor Strawinsky alla Fenice’, *Il giornale d’Italia* (12 September 1951). See also, Radius, ‘Il libertino di Strawinski: l’avvenimento musicale del 1951’ (September 1951), cutting in the Paul Sacher Stiftung (PSS: 133.1953); and Pannain, ‘Alla “Fenice” per il Festival veneziano della musica: *La carriera del libertino* non darà gloria a Strawinsky’.

resurgence of serialism.<sup>83</sup> Those defending neoclassicism claimed that hostility towards *The Rake* (for example by René Leibowitz and his followers) was primarily the result of a misunderstanding: seeing the opera as exemplifying Stravinsky's old age, rather than his parodic *modernità*.<sup>84</sup> Some interpreted the antagonism between the two camps as reducible to a battle between realism and abstraction.<sup>85</sup> Evocations of historicity were deemed 'realist', while dodecaphony was hailed as a move to the 'purity' of abstraction.<sup>86</sup> What is more, the kinds of game-playing supposedly at work in *The Rake* were part of a contemporary critique by the Left of the inappropriateness of such ludic play in the present moment. The music critic of *L'Unità*, Enzo Borelli, drew on Stravinsky as an example when he claimed that whereas dodecaphonists valued the progression of language and testing the limits of its expressive potential, neoclassicists had become mired in playing pointless games disengaged from life ('come autogioco, disimpegnato da qualunque legame con la vita').<sup>87</sup>

To recapitulate the terrain traversed thus far, then, commentators of Stravinsky's opera were engaged in an ongoing struggle to locate what exactly from the past they were hearing, and how they were supposed to negotiate these older sounds within the context of a much-hyped operatic premiere. Yet whereas scholarly debate has tended to position *The Rake* in an antithetical position to other postwar modernist goings on, the reception of the premiere suggests that the situation in Italy in 1951 was far less straightforward. While the opera's historicity was indeed perceived

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<sup>83</sup> Vlad, however, saw both neoclassicism and serialism as concerned with formal objectivity, which he claimed arose from the residues of 'romantic subjectivism' and 'impressionist sensitivism'. See, Vlad, 'Panorama espressivo della musica contemporanea'.

<sup>84</sup> For example, see Adriano Lualdi, 'Prima mondiale al Festival della *La carriera di Rake* di Stravinsky entusiasticamente accolta a "La Fenice"', *Roma* (12 September 1951).

<sup>85</sup> One critic even called Stravinsky's use of the past 'questa più che neorealismo' (this more than neorealism); see Lunghi, 'In una grandiose cornice la "prima" mondiale di Stravinsky alla Fenice: la "carriera di un libertino" opera dalle idee non create'. A battle between realism and abstraction was also the dominant discourse at the art Biennale; see Jachec, *Politics and Paintings at the Venice Biennale 1948-64*, and Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969). For example, Armando Pizzinato's figurative painting, *Insurrezione a Venezia*, caused heated discussion on its showing at the 1952 Biennale: its explicit representation of memories of war jarred in a climate in which even the leftwing modernist Venetian artist Emilio Vedova had denounced realism and moved to non-figurative abstraction.

<sup>86</sup> Mario Zafred outlined the contemporary crisis of music in these terms; in Zafred, 'Ragioni dell'antiformalismo', *Ulisse* 14/5 (1951), 138-43.

<sup>87</sup> Enzo Borelli, 'Dal neoclassicismo alla dodecafonia', in Borelli, ed., *Atti del Quinto Congresso di musica* (Florence: Barbera, 1948), 146-52, here 149. Borelli also alluded to Fascism in his critique of neoclassicism: he claimed that the heyday of the latter was during a period that now appeared 'autentica desertizzazione dei valori umani', a time of the 'sepolcro imbiancato', when the trains ran on time and when the bourgeoisie delighted in the fact that the world seemed to have formed itself to their order (pp. 146-47).

as antithetical to serialism, that did not mean it was entirely devoid of modernist credentials; rather than dismiss the opera as a throw-back after the war, Italian critics took its fossilised revenants seriously. Although they found its music strange and unsettling, that was in part because they identified its timeliness: as staging contemporary concerns of opera crisis, of an increasingly ossified musical past in a time more concerned with the future.

Neoclassicism within this specific Italian context could almost be called a ‘crisis modernism’, such was the all-pervasive impression of a past that touched on contemporary anxieties about the place of music culture in the postwar climate, an enjoyable past that needed to be sublimated into something more modern. *The Rake* was thus perceived as nestling at the centre of a series of postwar divides: between the importance of their own operatic heritage and the need for the operatically new; between the simultaneous imperatives of progress and nostalgia. If Italy’s operatic modernity was rooted in the past, it was in part because such operatic nostalgia was seen as productive. For all its troubling resonances, opera was seemingly re-emerging postwar as a space for negotiation with the past, concerned as it was with re-developing its museum culture amid widespread postwar perceptions of crisis.

### **Radiophonic listening**

Another element of debate surrounding *The Rake*’s premiere had wider echoes in contemporary discourse: the state of opera in the face of new mass entertainment. Much critical interest was generated by the fact that Stravinsky wrote this swansong of ‘old Europe’ and its ageing culture from the ‘new world’ of West Coast America, a world immersed in the ultimate twentieth-century medium of film.<sup>88</sup> Discussion homed in especially on the premiere being broadcast on the radio, something that prompted many to consider the particular nature of the relationship between radio and opera.<sup>89</sup> Some suggested that radio opera was an interesting theoretical and practical experiment, one that showed the art form need not be entirely dismissed as a defunct

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<sup>88</sup> The early 1950s remained a golden age of film, with around 3,000 new cinemas appearing in the first half of the 1950s in Italy alone. For more on this, see Barbara Corsi, *Con qualche dollaro in più. Storia economica del cinema italiano* (Rome: Riuniti, 2001). The historic Teatro Rossini in Venice was even partially demolished in 1951 to convert it into a cinema.

<sup>89</sup> The seminal role of radio in postwar opera culture was established by the premiere of Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Il prigioniero* as a radio broadcast on 1 December 1949 (it was subsequently performed at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in 1950), which was to become one of the most discussed operas in Italy of the period.

spectacle.<sup>90</sup> Thus a re-emergence of radio aesthetics postwar directly impacted on opera discourse.<sup>91</sup>

Few could deny that radio enabled a much greater and faster dissemination of opera. Given the price of seats at La Fenice, it seemed remarkable that many had heard the same performance at home for free. Furthermore, such new levels of dissemination critically empowered the average listener; as one critic commented: 'A simple listener could, on the evening of 11 September (or those of 17 and 24: repeats on other networks), get an idea of the work, assess the reception of the Venetian public and compare everything with the opinions expressed by the morning papers'.<sup>92</sup> The result of the performance was thus a 'foretaste of the need for critics to adapt to the average judgement of the public, who are now widely called upon to judge; to think that the sophistication and exclusiveness of certain positions is no longer sustainable, at least in the newspapers, when those positions are threatened by the onslaughts of the masses'.<sup>93</sup> Some were disconcerted by this prospect (and perhaps by the loss of their own power), claiming that increased authority of listeners was a positive development, but that there still needed to be analysis by the professional critic.<sup>94</sup>

This changing nature of music criticism had a particular cogency with regard to *The Rake*: many in the press noted that it was the critics who were most perplexed by the opera, with most of the audience relishing its sounds of the past. Those critics who used the listeners to bolster their opinions—such as we encountered at the outset of this chapter—instead belied the precariousness of their own positions. A schism between audience enjoyment and critical unease was bound to only exacerbate concern

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<sup>90</sup> See, for example, V. Incauda, 'La radio: una prima assoluta', *Idea* (30 September 1951).

<sup>91</sup> Giorgio Pugliaro relates this to an idea of 'radiogenia': a work (musical or otherwise) whose qualities are enhanced by radio; in Pugliaro, 'La musica per la radio e per la televisione', in Ferruccio Cibra and Ferruccio Tammaro, eds., *Musica in scena: storia dello spettacolo musicale*, vol. 6 (Turin: Unione Tipografica, 1997), 337-58.

<sup>92</sup> 'Un semplice ascoltatore poteva, la sera dell'11 settembre (o quelle del 17 o del 24: repliche su altre reti), farsi un'idea dell'opera, valutare le accoglienze del pubblico veneziano, e confrontare il tutto con i giudizi espressi dai giornali del mattino'; Incauda, 'La radio: una prima assoluta'. A similar discussion of dissemination and empowerment surrounded the performance of Verdi's *Attila* that same week; for more on this, see Chapter Three.

<sup>93</sup> 'pregusta la necessità che la critica si adegui al giudizio medio del pubblico ormai largamente chiamato a giudicare; pensa che la ricercatezza e l'esclusivismo di certe posizioni non è più sostenibile, almeno dai quotidiani, quando quelle posizioni sono minacciate da assalti di massa'; *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Goffredo Bellonci, 'Un anno di terzo programma', *La Scala* (15 November 1951). Such anxieties were also played out in response to the revival of Verdi's *Attila* that week; for more on this, see Chapter Three.



by the latter over the empowerment of the former. Thus although *The Rake* seemed to win over an increasingly apathetic public, that success was deemed to be merely because it played to their enjoyment of older spectacles.<sup>95</sup> This was how many sought to evaluate audience reaction to Anne's high C, for example.

But such new means of dissemination and entertainment posed deeper aesthetic problems. Radio operas, concerts and other musical broadcasts were becoming institutionalised with the advent of postwar network broadcasting.<sup>96</sup> Together with the increasing ownership of records and gramophones, these media and their practices were central to the formation of a back catalogue of performed music.<sup>97</sup> Journals around this time were devoted to analysing the nexus of opera, crisis and new media.<sup>98</sup> A rhetoric of crisis was applied, above all, to opera's obsolescence in the face of radio and cinema. There was also the 'phantasmatic' medium of television: not yet introduced in Italy, but already integrated into cultural debate.<sup>99</sup> Piero Santi, for example, wrote an article for the journal *Diapason* that analysed the likely impact of television's specific qualities on contemporary music culture. Posing the question, 'Può esistere un problema estetico della televisione?' (Could there exist an aesthetic problem of television?), he concluded that the emergent medium had its own inherent characteristics and capabilities, ones that placed it somewhere between theatre and cinema.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, these were governed by its overriding quality of 'un

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<sup>95</sup> The increasingly apathetic audiences for new opera is discussed in Giorgio Graziosi, 'Il melodramma è morto?', *Ulisse* 5/14 (April 1951), 154-59. He also writes that even 'nel mercato musicale di un prodotto eccellente' (in the musical marketing of an excellent product) crisis cannot be resolved, which is thus primarily a crisis of consumption (p.157). For further discussion of this article, see Chapter Three.

<sup>96</sup> For histories of the radio in Italy, see Antonio Papa, *Storia politica della radio in Italia*, 2 vols. (Naples: Guida, 1978) and Anna Lucia Natale, *Gli anni della radio (1924-1954). Contributo ad una storia sociale dei media in Italia* (Naples: Liguori, 1990).

<sup>97</sup> New techniques for recording to tape were initiated in 1947, and in 1951 the 33rpm and 45rpm were introduced. The first foreign catalogues appeared in 1948. For more on this, see Paolo Prato, *La musica italiana. Una storia sociale dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 257; and Mario De Luigi, *L'industria discografica in Italia* (Rome: Lato Side, 1982).

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, the journals *Ulisse* 5/14 (April 1951) and *Diapason* 1-12 (1952).

<sup>99</sup> The idea of 'phantasmatic' media is discussed in Eric Kluitenberg, 'On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media', in Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 48-69. Although television broadcasting did not begin in Italy until 1954, its imminent arrival was much discussed: see, for example, 'Il Ministro Spataro alla XVIII Mostra nazionale radio e televisione', *Radiocorriere* (30 August-6 September 1951).

<sup>100</sup> Piero Santi, 'Musica e televisione', *Diapason* 3-4 (1952), 22-26, here 22. See also Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004).

montaggio “istantaneo” (instantaneous montage), that foreground experiences of collage and eclecticism in its very means.

Contemporary media culture thus framed *The Rake* in more specifically musical ways. Aside from canon formation and more abstract notions of eclecticism and hybridity, critics’ responses to Stravinsky’s opera—of museality, objectivity and mechanical coldness—were a refraction of discourse taking place on mass communication technology.<sup>101</sup> As Jeffrey Sconce has outlined, by the early 1950s, the sense of the uncanny experience of disembodied sounds that had been pervasive earlier in the century was relinquished owing to radio’s sheer ubiquity, and the terms of the discourse had been expropriated: deadness now applied to the re-enlivening of sounds long thought dead—from earlier recordings of those who had died, to performances of sounds that had previously been forgotten.<sup>102</sup> Radio was seen to be doing recuperative work—putting the past on display, just as Stravinsky’s opera had done; as one critic stated:

Né solo le opere di repertorio o di nuova esecuzione ci ha dato la Radio: anzi, è risalita al Seicento per rintracciare e poi farci ascoltare i primi melodrammi, al Settecento per farci conoscere i concerti d’arco, all’Ottocento romantico per farci ricantare al microfono tutti i ‘lieder’ dei ‘cicli vocali’ di Schubert, di Schumann e degli altri grandi compositori di quel tempo.<sup>103</sup>

[Radio did not just give us works from the current repertoire or new compositions: on the contrary, it went back to the seventeenth century, to discover and enable us to listen to the very first operas, to the eighteenth century to introduce us to the *concerti d’arco*, and to the romantic nineteenth century for us to hear recordings of all the lieder of the song cycles by Schubert, Schumann and the other great composers of that period.]

In other words, ‘history is still not well known to us since we have not yet explored all the funds of the archives at our disposal’.<sup>104</sup> And the radio provided an appropriate means for putting this scholarly labour on display.

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<sup>101</sup> This was also a feature of more transnational discussion; see, for example, Sigfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), and Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1951).

<sup>102</sup> Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>103</sup> Bellonci, ‘Un anno di terzo programma’.

<sup>104</sup> ‘storia non ancora ben conosciuta da noi stessi che non ci siamo curati di esplorare tutti i fondi dei nostri archivi’; *ibid.* The novelist and theorist André Malraux correspondingly argued that mechanical

The same language and preoccupations of media analysis in the pages of *Ulisse* and *Diapason* were thus occurring in the reception of *The Rake*: of the place of older music among the new, of the implications for new atomised aesthetic experiences for older ‘organic’ artistic forms. The fact that such experiences were still disconcerting in the opera house, despite becoming common with new media, perhaps resides in there being more at stake in opera being both new (so as to contradict cries of obsolescence), and yet paradoxically retaining a traditional identity (countering the threat of new mass entertainments). The meeting point of opera and radio shows the increasing critical desperation of the former in response to the easy hegemony of the latter. Yet the picture was more intricate still than this might suggest. Despite *The Rake*’s premiere—in all its spectacle and pageantry—being in many ways a remnant of the past, once the opera began, the sound world had more in common with other, more modern, forms of auditory experience than have previously been accounted for.

### Conclusion: a Venetian funeral

On 15 April 1971 a similar Venetian spectacle took place. Crowds thronged in San Giovanni e Páolo and sprawled over the Ponte Cavallo. Venetians and tourists peered over one another to get a better look. A lucky few had gained vantage points from overlooking buildings, and leaned out of the windows to witness the events unfolding below, where some five hundred had gathered, according to *Il gazzettino*.<sup>105</sup> Among the cosmopolitan public again stood *paparazzi*, anxious to secure an image for the following day’s press. The occasion was the funeral of Stravinsky.<sup>106</sup> His body lay in the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Páolo, whose doors were open to the masses. Inside stood 3000 people for the noon public service (see Figure 1).<sup>107</sup>

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reproduction (his example was photography), was turning the past into an archive; in Malraux, ‘The Museum Without Walls’, in *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978 [1951]), 13-130.

<sup>105</sup> Ivo Prandin, ‘Fastosa cerimonia funebre per Stravinsky: e adesso Venezia custodisce spoglie e memoria di Igor’, *Il gazzettino* (16 April 1971).

<sup>106</sup> For local commentary of the occasion, see ‘Per i solenni funerali: la salma di Stravinski giunge stamane a Venezia’, *Il gazzettino* (14 April 1971); ‘Stamattina a Venezia i funerali di Stravinsky’, *Il gazzettino* (15 April 1971).

<sup>107</sup> Prandin, ‘Fastosa cerimonia funebre per Stravinsky: e adesso Venezia custodisce spoglie e memoria di Igor’. It was a Greek Orthodox *kathistos*—a standing service, led by the archimandrite Malissianos Cherubino.



Figure 1: The funeral of Igor Stravinsky, in the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Páolo; reproduced in Manlio Brusatin, ed., *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1980), plate 194.

The pageantry had begun the day before, when Stravinsky's body arrived in Venice at 9am and was transported, in the company of two Greek Orthodox priests, from Campo San Tomà to the Cappella della Madonna del Rosario of the Basilica.<sup>108</sup> A wake was held for the remainder of the day, allowing Venetians and visitors to pay their respects.<sup>109</sup> At 10am on Thursday 15 April the corpse was transferred to the nave of the Basilica. There the coffin stood on a black cast with white Maltese crosses, surrounded by four golden *candelabri del presbiterio* at every edge. The first music heard was Alessandro Scarlatti's *Requiem Missa Defunctorum*, followed by three Andrea Gabrieli organ pieces. Next the DC mayor of Venice, Giorgio Longo, delivered a commemoration address in which he cited not just Stravinsky's love of the city, but

<sup>108</sup> This is according to the official programme of events; Craft contradicts such an itinerary, saying that the body arrived on 13 April to a Venice 'fog-wrapped and phantom-like'; in Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship, 1948-1971* (New York: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994 [1971]), 414.

<sup>109</sup> 'The wake is largely social in content, emphasizing that the loss is a unit event, a happening of the group'; in Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 214.

also those of other cultural émigrés.<sup>110</sup> Finally Stravinsky's own *Requiem Canticles* was performed, conducted by Robert Craft, before the service proper began.<sup>111</sup>

At the service's conclusion, four gondoliers in black sashes carried the coffin in a procession out into the square, past Andrea del Verrocchio's Bartolomeo Colleoni statue to the funeral gondola emblazoned with the gold lions of San Marco, with a surround of roses garnishing its top.<sup>112</sup> As bells sounded throughout the city, echoing those heard at the end of the *Requiem*, the crowd paused in reverential silence, while others congregated by the San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti and on to the Fondamente Nove, as the hearse passed underneath (see Figure 2). Film crews and *paparazzi* pursued the gondola procession as it passed under the Ponte dei Mendicanti, along the *rio* and out in to the lagoon, across to the *cimitero* on Isola di San Michele. At three in the afternoon there was a private service at Mauro di Coducci's Renaissance church followed by burial on the island.<sup>113</sup> Stravinsky was laid to rest next to Sergei Diaghilev in the Russian corner, in a grave adorned with a large horizontal block of stone.<sup>114</sup>

Although Stravinsky did not die in Venice, the pageantry of his death—the spectacle of his burial—emphatically occurred there. The event was an historical spectacle, a daguerreotype of a bygone era, recreated to draw the composer into a particular relationship with historical Venice. One reporter noted the similarity of the event to the visual pageantry often found in the paintings of the Renaissance Venetian artist Vittore Carpaccio. A 'special relationship' between the composer and the city was constantly invoked.<sup>115</sup> Many reporters used the occasion to reflect back on *The Rake's* premiere two decades earlier, and in particular the opera's sepulchral

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<sup>110</sup> Most notably Ezra Pound, who was in attendance. He was to die one year later, in Venice, and is buried in the Protestant quarter of the cemetery on Isola di San Michele.

<sup>111</sup> In a grand sweep of appropriately Mozartian myth-making, it is often suggested (particularly by Craft) that Stravinsky composed the *Requiem Canticles* with the idea that they were likely to be played at his own funeral.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Porter's poem for the occasion uses the composer's death as a metaphor for the death of Old Europe: 'From Colleoni's shadow/ in a final purple,/ out of the grinner's black,/ an old man in a box/ is carried to a gondola/ and warped to the Isle/ of the Dead ... This is the death of Europe,/ this is the eclipse - /an oar rises on the lagoon'; in Porter, 'La Déploration sur la Mort d'Igor Stravinsky', in *Preaching to the Converted* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 56.

<sup>113</sup> For more details on the funeral arrangements, see the funeral programme booklet: 'Onoranze funebri a Igor Stravinsky' (Venice, 15 April 1971).

<sup>114</sup> Such rituals of Venetian burials had been given renewed life in the twentieth century through their use by the Fascist regime for purposes of politicised spectacle; see Kate Ferris, 'Death in Venice: The "fascistisation" of funerals and the rituals of death', in *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice, 1929-40* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 155-87.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, 'In gondola i funerali di Stravinski', *Il progresso Italo-Americano* (Friday 16 April 1971).



Figure 2: The funeral of Igor Stravinsky; reproduced in Manlio Brusatin, ed., *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1980), plate 195.

resonances.<sup>116</sup> D'Annunzio had written in his novel *Il fuoco* (1900) of another foreign composer who died in Venice, and who had a longer history with the city:

Sai tu che a Venezia Riccardo Wagner ebbe i suoi primi colloqui colla morte, or son più di vent'anni, al tempo del *Tristano*? ... ora il suo fato lo riconduce sulle lagune. Sembra destinato ch'egli abbia qui la sua fine, come Claudio Monteverdi.<sup>117</sup>

[Do you know that it was in Venice that Richard Wagner had his first dialogues with death, more than twenty years ago, at the time of *Tristan*?... now his fate brings him back to the lagoon. It seems destined that he meet his end here, just like Claudio Monteverdi.]

In the novel, Monteverdi is continually invoked as a reference point in Italian history, a history conceived through Venetian operatic heritage.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, just as with *The*

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Mario Messinis, 'Le "prime" Stravinskiane sulla lagune: fu "disumano" e "cinico" perché rigenerò la musica', *Il gazzettino* (15 April 1971).

<sup>117</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco* (Milan: Mondadori, 1989 [1900]), 187.

<sup>118</sup> Monteverdi is also buried in Venice, at Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. Death in Venice is a common trope in writing on the city, as Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger put it: 'the city itself is a celebration of death, a sinking empire of Eastern beauty, the closest Western city to Byzantium'; in *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky*, trans. Jeff Hamburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8.

*Rake*, the funeral events were to be broadcast—now both televised and on the radio. Forty international television stations were linked to the RAI, which broadcast events live from the Basilica.<sup>119</sup> Thus the impetus of this inscriptive pageant—the mediation of an historical spectacle through a celebrity and mass entertainment economy—again illuminate broader cultural processes of rewriting and accommodation, ones both jarring and yet somehow vital to the present.

The occasions of *The Rake*'s premiere and Stravinsky's Venetian funeral therefore provide in microcosm the cultural conflicts and contradictory impulses of nascent postwar culture. Both were nestled at the centre of mid-century divides: the place of Venetian heritage in postwar *modernità*, of historical spectacle and museum cultures in a future-orientated society. If Stravinsky's opera framed the present in terms of the past, the problem was that it was premiered in a societal context that sought to frame the present in terms of the future. A time of collective amnesia and political continuity, the disillusionment with the nation's past fed a desire for Calvino's *tabula rasa* and renewal. The picture within operatic culture, however, was more complicated: within this prospective outlook, opera houses were becoming anchors of memory. The processes of disavowal of the past jarred with an operatic culture that sought to remember and reinstate past experiences.

*The Rake*'s unsettling sounds reverberated deeper still: they both exemplified and exacerbated perceptions of opera crisis. If in one sense that made the opera the most timely work imaginable, some then took this a step further: Stravinsky's portrayal of an eclectic musical past contained an inherently modern aspect, one premised on an objectively detached and mechanical outlook; a perspective, in addition, seen to be the *modus operandi* of contemporary mass media such as the radio. This situation only complicated the emergent and divisive postwar resurgence of a supposedly modernistic 'expressive' dodecaphony and the untimely *autogiocchi* of neoclassicism. Thus Stravinsky's neoclassicism at this moment was not so much conceived simply as a retrospective and restorative move, but as a pared-down anti-expressionism—an anti-humanism manifest in a cold objectivity.

If the premiere of *The Rake* thus sheds light on the twisting narratives of the past, it also shows just how knotty these narratives became when faced with listening

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<sup>119</sup> 'A Venezia mercoledì le spoglie mortali di Igor Stravinski', *Il gazzettino* (9 April 1971); and 'I funerali in diretta alla TV', *Il gazzettino* (15 April 1971).

to the opera's sounds. The opera resided at the centre of the contemporary crisis: a dead-end and a way forward, an eclecticism premised on continuity. Its sound world reverberated with previously enchanting expressive vehicles now made into mechanised and arid fossils, but fossils that when inserted into a more modern framework, could become a mobilised museum—one still capable of speaking to the present. Just as crowds lining the Fondamente Nove saw an evocation of local history—the pageantry of a Venetian funeral—played out in the present of 1971, so too as the curtains rose on that September night in La Fenice, the audience heard sounds of recent history cloaked in a 1951 *tinta*. A disquieting and yet inescapable past played out in a modern opera: of history rewritten for the present, and for the future.



## Chapter Three

### *A futura memoria: Verdi's Attila, 1951*

A past haunts this present.<sup>1</sup>

By burying the dead we create, not our future, but our past.<sup>2</sup>

And only where there are graves are there resurrections.<sup>3</sup>

#### Sepulchral commemorations

The advent of 1951 saw the staging of a series of commemorative events to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Giuseppe Verdi's death. Although these took place in various municipal centres, those in Milan were, perhaps inevitably, the highpoint. On 22 January, under a week before the official event on the date of Verdi's death (27 January), a small crowd of devotees gathered for an intimate and sepulchral day at the Casa di riposo (the retirement home for musicians that Verdi had founded in his last years). The group descended into the crypt, where the composer was interred next to his partner, Giuseppina Strepponi, to conduct what the press called 'a sacred rite'.<sup>4</sup> As they paused before the tomb, a resident of the Casa, playing an out-of-tune piano from a room beside the crypt, launched into the chorus 'Va pensiero': an extract from Verdi's 1842 opera *Nabucco* that had become increasingly entwined with the history of the Risorgimento, the nineteenth-century movement for Italian unification. The marble lid of Verdi's tomb was removed to reveal the coffin, with its oval glass window

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<sup>1</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988 [1975]), 25. The phrase 'A futura memoria' is from Leonardo Sciascia's *A futura memoria (se la memoria ha un futuro)* (Rome: Bompiani, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> This is Eelco Runia's tenth thesis on commemoration, in 'Burying the Dead, Creating the Past', *History and Theory* 46/3 (2007), 313-25, here 325.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2003), 86.

<sup>4</sup> 'Ricognizione alla tomba di un grande: il volto di Verdi ritrovato ieri intatto nella bara dopo mezzo secolo', *Il messaggero di Roma* (23 January 1951). One critic contradicted this otherwise ubiquitous account, claiming that the exhumation was done because of water leakage and the need for repairs; see Filippo Sacchi, 'Ha inizio l'anno celebrativo', *La nuova stampa* (27 January 1951). The language of the press frequently recalls Gabriele D'Annunzio's famous oration, given during the *trigesimo* celebrations at the University of Florence: 'Voi siete qui adunati, o Giovani, per assistere ad un servizio divino, per celebrare un rito solenne, per innalzare verso una sacra immagine la vostra preghiera unanime' (You are assembled here, O Young People, to attend a divine service, to celebrate a solemn rite, to raise your unanimous prayer towards a sacred image); D'Annunzio, *In morte di Giuseppe Verdi: canzone preceduta da una orazione ai giovani* (1901) (Milan: Treves, 1913), 3.

positioned over the composer's face. A photographer was present to record the scene; the resultant image was reprinted in the local and national press (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

## Incorrotta la salma di Verdi cinquant'anni dopo la morte

La ricognizione della tomba alla Casa di riposo - Sabato l'inizio delle celebrazioni alla presenza del Capo dello Stato che inaugurerà anche la nuova sede del Circolo della Stampa



Dietro il cristallo il volto del Maestro.

stazioni. Esse si svolgeranno nell'anno celebrativo, a partire dal 27 corrente. Per questo giorno il Sindaco di Milano e il sovrintendente della Scala invitano i cittadini di Milano e di Italia tutti a partecipare alle celebrazioni inauguranti.

Le manifestazioni che si svolgono sotto l'alto patronato di Luigi Einaudi, avranno inizio alle ore 9 con una funzione religiosa in Duomo. Il rito, senza musica, sarà presenziato dal cardinale Schuster, assistito dal Capitolo metropolitano, e celebrato dal mons. Bernareggi. Le autorità, le rappresentanze, e i membri del Comitato si receranno poi a rendere un devoto omaggio alla tomba di Verdi, alla Casa di Riposo, dove il coro della Scala, diretto dal maestro Vitore Veneziani, canterà il « Va pensiero... » del Nabucco e dove, nella cripta, saranno deposte corone votive. Parteciperanno alla visita tutte le alte personalità convenute a Milano, intorno al Capo dello Stato, i sindaci di Parma, Roma, Trieste, Genova, Torino, Venezia e delle principali città, rappresentanti di Accademie, Atenei, Conservatori, tutti i sovrintendenti degli Enti autonomi teatrali d'Italia, musicologi, studiosi, artisti, magistrati. Sarà pure rappresentato il sindaco di Busseto.

Alla sera, alle ore 21, al teatro alla Scala, il ministro Gonella pronuncerà un'orazione commemorativa di Giuseppe Verdi e alle 21.30 avrà inizio l'esecuzione della « Messa da Requiem » dell'orchestra, cori e solisti della Scala, sotto la direzione del maestro

Figure 1: *Corriere della sera* (24 January 1951).

The image captured an eerie tableau: the photographic lens pointed down on to the crowd peering into the vault and onto the coffin. A silhouette of the corpse was visible through the glass panel.

The crowd were, the press reported, immediately struck by how Verdi's face was remarkably untouched by fifty years of death. 'A moment of awe and emotion' spread through those present, with barely a dry eye in the room; initially they believed the vision to be 'a phenomenon of collective optical illusion'.<sup>6</sup> News reports subsequently made much of this 'miracle'. The composer's features remained 'intact

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, 'Incorrotta la salma di Verdi cinquant'anni dopo la morte', *Corriere della sera* (24 January 1951).

<sup>6</sup> 'Un attimo di stupore e di commozione ... un fenomeno di illusione ottica collettiva'; in 'Ricognizione alla tomba di un grande: il volto di Verdi ritrovato ieri intatto nella bara dopo mezzo secolo'.

like those of a saint': the cravat still nestled under the chin, hair and beard were instantly recognisable.<sup>7</sup> One reporter claimed,

Attraverso il vetro, infatti, il volto del Maestro, dopo cinquant'anni di sonno, comparve incorrotto. La barba e i baffi, e i folti capelli bianchi, incorniciavano ancora il suo viso, dalle palpebre abbassate, sul quale la morte non aveva voluto lasciare il suo segno distruggitore.<sup>8</sup>

[Indeed through the glass the Maestro's face, after fifty years of sleep, appeared incorruptible. The beard, moustache and thick white hair still framed his face, the eyelids lowered, over which death had spared its destroying touch.]

A distinction between Verdi's material corpse and the 'spirit' of his music became a feature of accounts: the visit to the tomb was 'a perfect approach to his glorified remains, a quasi-material encounter with what is left of him on earth, while his spirit still hovers over the fervent singing'.<sup>9</sup> Verdi as an incorruptible—his exhumed body unmarked by death—had obvious religious resonance.<sup>10</sup> 'Incorruptibility' is a term with its own *tinta* in Italian ecclesiastical history, applied in the Roman Catholic Church to supposedly sacred bodies that show little sign of decay.<sup>11</sup> It had long been a

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<sup>7</sup> 'Miracolo: dietro al cristallo il volto del caro vecchio era intatto, come quello di un santo'; Orio Vergani, 'Il caro vecchio', *Corriere della sera* (27 January 1951).

<sup>8</sup> 'Ricognizione alla tomba di un grande: il volto di Verdi ritrovato ieri intatto nella bara dopo mezzo secolo'. Morbid detail was repeatedly included in the press to emphasise the preservation of Verdi's identity: 'Davvero incredibile si è rivelato lo stato di conservazione del volto: non era un teschio, uno di quei teschi che la morte rende anonimi, e quale gli astanti si attendevano. Era ancora il viso di Giuseppe Verdi ... Solo la pelle duramente incartapecorita e aderente agli zigomi e alle ossa della vasta fronte, era annerita sì che per uno strano effetto sembrava di vedere la lastra d'una negativa fotografica. Ma era riconoscibilissimo; i suoi capelli, la barba candida, la cravatta nera e parte della giacca erano composti come in un ritratto' (Indeed the state of preservation of his face was incredible: it was not just a skull, one of those skulls that death renders anonymous, which was what the onlookers had expected to see. It was still the face of Giuseppe Verdi ... Only the hard, parched skin adhering to his cheeks and to the bones of his broad forehead were blackened by some bizarre effect that made it seem like a photographic negative. But he was still so recognisable: his hair, white beard, black tie and part of his jacket were composed like a portrait); 'Incorrotta la salma di Verdi cinquant'anni dopo la morte'.

<sup>9</sup> 'un ideale accostamento alle spoglie gloriose, quasi un materiale incontro con ciò che di lui è rimasto sulla terra, mentre il suo spirito aleggia ancora nei fervidi canti'; *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Such symbolism also contrasted dramatically with the contemporary fate of Mussolini's corpse. For more on the violent treatment and exhumations of the dictator's body at this time, see Sergio Luzzatto, *Il corpo del duce: un cadavere tra immaginazione, storia e memoria* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> For a history of the incorruptible, see Piero Camporesi, *La carne impassibile. Salvezza e salute fra Medioevo e Controriforma* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1983).

requirement for canonisation. The composer's physical remains had become a monument, even a saintly relic.<sup>12</sup>

The 'official' day on 27 January centred on a similar event. This time attended by the President of the Republic, Luigi Einaudi, who arrived in Milan by train, the programme began with a commemorative service at the Duomo. Outside a large crowd had amassed in reverential silence.<sup>13</sup> Einaudi and his entourage were then transported by car to the Casa di riposo, where they too descended into the crypt. Again in silence, they 'paused reverently in front of the tomb', the act creating 'an atmosphere of profound emotion in everyone'.<sup>14</sup> In the great hall of the building, this time the chorus of La Scala sang 'Va pensiero'.<sup>15</sup> After an afternoon spent opening the Circolo della Stampa at the Palazzo Serbelloni, the President travelled to La Scala for a performance of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*. There the reverential silence was broken, the crowd enlivened by Verdi's music:

Un uragano di battimani, poi, si è scatenato quando ripetutamente, alla fine della *Messa da Requiem* ... un grido di 'Viva Verdi' echeggiò in teatro, subito ripreso da mille e mille ascoltatori levatisi in piedi nella platea, nei palchi, nelle

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<sup>12</sup> Despite the seeming transference of religious language to secular figures, the postwar period witnessed a resurgence in the power of the papacy; Federico Chabod had written in 1950 that the papacy now held a similar position in public life to that which it had enjoyed after the fall of the Roman Empire; see Chabod, *L'Italia contemporanea (1918-1948)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), 140. Celebrating secular icons was perhaps one way for the left to create a national heritage separate from the traditions of the church.

<sup>13</sup> Most reporters mentioned the gathered hordes and the reverential silence: one commentator wrote, for example, of 'una densa folla raccolta sul sagrato' (a dense crowd gathered in the churchyard), and that Einaudi left the Duomo 'in mezzo a una folla strabocchevole' (in the midst of an overflowing crowd); 'Le celebrazioni verdiane: presso la tomba del Maestro, Einaudi sosta reverente', *La stampa* (28 January 1951). See also, Franco Abbiati, 'Presente il Capo dello Stato hanno inizio le celebrazioni verdiane', *Corriere della sera* (28 January 1951).

<sup>14</sup> 'si fermava reverente davanti al tumulo' and 'un'atmosfera di profonda commozione in tutti'; *ibid.* For an account of the role of crowd emotion in mortuary ritual (via Émile Durkheim), see Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1991]). Emotional crowds were a topos of journalism on Fascist commemorations in Venice; see, for example, press reports of the funeral of Captain Eugenio Manetti, killed during the Fascist campaign in Ethiopia: 'Le esequie del cap. Eugenio Manetti', *La gazzetta di Venezia* (11 June 1936).

<sup>15</sup> Referring to the sentiments of those present became a recurrent feature of accounts, many noting in particular the power of 'Va pensiero' to instil group emotion: 'le onoranze a Verdi hanno avuto un particolare accento di commozione ... Nessuno degli ospiti ha potuto trattenere il pianto allorchè, dal salone superiore, il coro della Scala, diretto da Vittore Veneziani, ha intonato il fatidico "Va pensiero..." del *Nabucco*' (the honours for Verdi have had a particular emphasis on emotion ... None of the guests could hold back the tears when, from the upper room, the chorus of La Scala, directed by Vittore Veneziani, sang the momentous 'Va pensiero' from *Nabucco*); Vezio Monticelli, 'Il tributo d'affetto degli umili al cantore del popolo: Einaudi presenza a Milano alla commemorazione di Verdi', *Il gazzettino* (28 January 1951).

gallerie ... Era quello un semplice grido d'amore, ma concorde e incondizionato, ma finalmente libero dai sottintesi polemici e dalle speculazioni. Il grido di 'Viva Verdi'.<sup>16</sup>

[A storm of applause burst out several times when, at the end of the *Messa da Requiem* ... a cry of 'Viva Verdi' resounded in the theatre, immediately taken up by thousands and thousands of listeners, who rose to their feet in the stalls, the boxes, the gallery ... It was a simple cry of love, but concordant and unconditional, and finally free from polemical undertones and speculation. The cry of 'Viva Verdi'.]

Verdi's music may supposedly have been shorn of its political connotations, but it was still able to rejuvenate an enervated crowd. The day concluded with the inauguration of an exhibition of Verdi's autograph scores in the theatre's Ridotto.

Documents were also a feature of the Venetian commemoration that took place simultaneously: an exhibition of memorabilia was put together in the Sale Apollinee of La Fenice, containing correspondence, autograph scores, posters and libretti relating to Verdi's relationship with the theatre and the city. An oration was given by the famous writer Riccardo Bacchelli to inaugurate the exhibition; a large crowd listened attentively.<sup>17</sup> A special committee had been appointed by La Fenice to organise proceedings; commemorative books were published, and a performance of *Rigoletto* was timed to coincide with the hundredth anniversary of its premiere at the theatre.<sup>18</sup> Publications related to the Venetian events celebrated Verdi's association with the city: the composer's professed adoration, the number of his operas premiered there, as well as Venice's more general historical significance as an operatic milieu. Thus although a purportedly 'national' celebration had initially been planned—led by what one critic called an 'optimistic alliance' between Milan, Busseto and Parma—the plan eventually broke down, and the commemorations remained predominantly regional affairs.<sup>19</sup>

There were also echoes of earlier Verdian occasions. The commentary and orations surrounding the 1951 events in Italy repeatedly rehearsed the rhetoric of the

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<sup>16</sup> 'La Messa da Requiem, diretta da Victor De Sabata', *Corriere della sera* (28 January 1951).

<sup>17</sup> The same reporter noted that later the same evening, at a performance of *Rigoletto*, there was 'un'altra gran folla plaudente' (another large cheering crowd); Mario Nordio, '27 gennaio: una giornata memorabile: Venezia a Verdi', *Gazzettino-sera* (29-30 January 1951). Numerous other reports also mentioned the crowds present at every stage of the Venetian events.

<sup>18</sup> Diego Valeri, ed., *Verdi e La Fenice* (Venice: Ente Autonomo del Teatro La Fenice, 1951). *Rigoletto* was premiered at La Fenice on 11 March 1851.

<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Pecorini, 'Da Verdi a Strawinsky', *Settimo giorno* (3 January 1952).

composer's death and funeral in Milan fifty years earlier: the presence of an emotional crowd in reverential silence, the role of various media to relay and disseminate information, and the noisy bustle of the city momentarily subdued for the purpose.<sup>20</sup> 'Va pensiero' had also been sung and cries of 'Viva Verdi!' already carried the weight of a newly inscribed emotional resonance.<sup>21</sup> Reporters in 1951 even noted that the photograph taken of the composer's face through the coffin's glass resembled the image taken on his deathbed in the Hôtel Milan. There were also echoes of and continuities with Fascist commemorations of Verdi (in particular the 1941 anniversary of his death)—aspects that remained less explicit at the celebrations a decade later. As we shall see in what follows, considering these earlier discourses in light of 1951, we can begin to establish the cultural continuity involved in processes of commemoration.

It is thus worth pausing over the specific aspects of these commemorative occasions, in particular for the context they can provide of an event that took place later in 1951: the revival of Verdi's *Attila* at La Fenice on 12 September. Characteristics from earlier in the year were again present at this moment: the idiosyncrasies of local sites for a national commemoration; the schism between material vestiges and immortal sound, coming together in the idea of the incorruptible and the saintly relic; the politics of commemorative labour; the notion of exhumation and its technological mediation; the mythic status of certain operatic numbers, and their power to re-inscribe emotional and political narratives; and the commemorative nexus between music, silence and the crowd. These aspects in turn formed part of broader operatic and cultural discourses in 1951—particularly ones of crisis and stocktaking, underpinned by processes of rewriting the past for the future in the aftermath of war. In what follows, I will investigate how these preoccupations were clustered around the *Attila* revival: the notion of the opera as an exhumed classic; *Attila*'s Risorgimento echoes as a vehicle for preserving and rewriting post-unification history; and the 'materialities of communication' opened up by the revival as a media

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<sup>20</sup> For a fascinating account of the role of sound, silence and media at Verdi's funeral, see Gavin Williams, 'Orating Verdi: Death and the Media c.1901', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 23/3 (November 2011), 119-43.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, F. T. Marinetti's rhetoric in 'Les Funerailles d'un Dieu', *La Vogue: Revue mensuelle de littérature* (15 February 1901); reprinted in Carlo Gatti, *Verdi*, vol. 2 (Milan: Alpes, 1931), 521-25.

event.<sup>22</sup> I want to suggest, above all, that it was the particular culture of the postwar period that prompted not just a concern with recuperating the operatic past and recording for posterity, but that also reignited an emphasis on re-inscribing the emotional politics of Risorgimento icons.

### Venetian exhumations

*Attila*'s revival was staged under the auspices of Venice's Festival internazionale di musica contemporanea, part of which was that year devoted to Verdi celebrations. The opera was performed in concert—the festival publicity called it an 'oratorio'—by the orchestra and chorus of Radio italiana di Milano, under the direction of Carlo Maria Giulini.<sup>23</sup> There were numerous Venetian resonances: *Attila* was the second opera Verdi wrote for La Fenice, premiering on 17 March 1846;<sup>24</sup> the plot in part revolves around the founding of Venice itself (originally Aquileia, on the Adriatic lagoon), as well as featuring scenes near Rome, in the mid-fifth century. At the same time, with its tale of a resurgent Italy withstanding invasion and occupation, *Attila* was viewed by Verdi scholars and critics in 1951 as one of the composer's most patriotic operas. These echoes became central to the revival's reception: the Venetian press made much of the opera's local reverberations, while the national press interpreted *Attila* as the ultimate manifestation of *italianità*.

The revival was not the only musical highlight that week: the festival began with a performance of the *Messa da Requiem* on 8 September. Thus a work that owed its genesis to Verdi's desire to commemorate first Rossini and then the famous Milanese poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni, in turn came to inaugurate the Venetian commemorations of the composer himself (just as it had done earlier that

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<sup>22</sup> The phrase is taken from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds., *Materialities of Communication* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), where it is deployed to refer to the traces of 'presence' effects in systems of 'techniques, technologies, materials, procedures, and "media"' (p. 6).

<sup>23</sup> *Attila* was played by Italo Tajo, Ezio by Giangiaco Guelfi, Odabella by Caterina Mancini, Foresto by Gino Penno, Uldino by Aldo Bertocci and Leone by Dario Caselli. For more on the production details, see Michele Girardi and Franco Rossi, *Il Teatro La Fenice. Cronologia degli spettacoli, 1938-1991* (Venice: Albrizzi, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> The premiere was apparently coolly received, before *Attila* went on to become one of Verdi's most popular operas in the later 1850s. Only as the nineteenth century progressed did the opera fade from the repertoire. For an overview of its reception history, see Roger Parker, *The New Grove Guide to Verdi and His Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93-97.

year).<sup>25</sup> Some critics were affronted by the idea that a *contemporary* music festival should be inaugurated by a requiem from the previous century; others saw such a work's deathly preoccupations and historical, nationalist introspection as an appropriate comment on the postwar period's retrospective *modernità*.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps more noteworthy was the positioning of *Attila* between the world premiere and second performance of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (on 11 and 13 September respectively).<sup>27</sup> There was near-unanimous disdain in the press over the fact that Stravinsky's opera had drawn a larger audience than Verdi's, and that the festival had spent reputedly huge sums on both *The Rake's* production and Stravinsky's fee, while not providing sufficient funds for *Attila* to be even semi-staged.<sup>28</sup> Many sought to counteract the disappointing attendance figures with protestations that 'la rivelazione musicale' of 1951 was not Stravinsky's opera, but Verdi's.<sup>29</sup> Such anxieties were loaded with a heavier freight: of the place of national heritage in an increasingly transnational musical culture; of the ironies of juxtaposing a long-forgotten classic with an operatic premiere.

A concern with recording both the present and the past for the future—a concern, in other words, with posterity—was thus evident from the outset: in the notion of *Attila* as an 'exhumed' classic from the archives of operatic history. The fact that, as one critic claimed, 'There is no doubt that, for the majority—if not almost all

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<sup>25</sup> Verdi originally composed a final movement ('Libera me') in 1868 for the composite *Messa per Rossini* (never performed) by thirteen Italian composers. This movement was later incorporated into Verdi's *Requiem* for Manzoni, to be premiered on the first anniversary of the writer's death. The 1951 performance was undertaken by the orchestra and chorus of La Scala, under Victor De Sabata. The soprano role was sung by Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, who also sang the role of Anne in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, premiered the same week.

<sup>26</sup> Massimo Mila said the Requiem was a fitting opening to a festival that had become in many ways the showcase of the 'cemetery' of opera, and was a work that represented 'una specie di sublimazione del carattere nazionale attraverso la tradizione melodrammatica' (a kind of sublimation of the national character through the operatic tradition); see Mila, 'La "Messa" di Verdi apre il Festival della musica', *L'Unità* (9 September 1951).

<sup>27</sup> The other major event of the 1951 festival was a 'Commemorazione di Arnold Schoenberg', who had died on 30 September that year. For a discussion of *The Rake's* premiere, see Chapter Two of the present thesis.

<sup>28</sup> For displeasure at attendance figures, see, for example, Mario Medici, 'Il Festival della musica a Venezia: *Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi eseguito in forma di oratorio', *Il giornale dell'Emilia* (13 September 1951); for a critique of festival funding policy, see, for example, Mario Rinaldi, 'Al Festival di Venezia: *Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi', *Il messaggero di Roma* (13 September 1951). Correspondence and press releases held at the Biennale's Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC) show, however, that the revival of *Attila* was planned much later than *The Rake's Progress* (the documents beginning 7 July and 7 April 1951 respectively), which may also be a reason for the reduced scale of Verdi's opera.

<sup>29</sup> Medici, 'Il Festival della musica a Venezia: *Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi eseguito in forma di oratorio'.



the listeners, the music of the opera was new', rendered *Attila* suitable for reinstating in the context of a contemporary music festival, alongside operatic premieres.<sup>30</sup> The reviews contain numerous allusions to the recuperative work of the anniversary, which meant above all a chance to rehear these operas long-forgotten, and also to reconsider *Attila's* relationship to its original context—to which it was seen as being indelibly linked.<sup>31</sup> That no one could seemingly remember having heard *Attila* before meant that critics made an immediate connection with the opera's first listeners and its politically tumultuous original context: there was no messy performance history to obscure the gap between premiere and revival.

A prominent task of commemorative work that year—both in Venice and elsewhere—had been the re-discovery of operas that had fallen from the repertoire. Much of this work was prompted by the anniversary; as one reporter stated, 'From deep in the theatre archives, the old and forgotten compositions by Giuseppe Verdi emerge one at a time in the light of the fiftieth anniversary'.<sup>32</sup> What is more, this recuperative activity was called an 'exhumation': one Filippo Sacchi claimed that alongside the 'exhumation' of Verdi's tomb, there was 'also an exhumation in the Verdian repertoire, a formidable exhumation: the exhibition of all Verdi's original scores'.<sup>33</sup> Conferences, speeches, special publications and performances provided a network of commemorative activity that sought to reacquaint the public with forgotten music and expand the operatic repertoire.

The question repeatedly asked of *Attila* was whether it was worthy of inclusion in the pantheon of operatic classics. Critics pointed out that the opera was from an early period, a phase marked by less successful works (it was preceded by *Giovanna*

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<sup>30</sup> 'Non c'è dubbio che, per la maggioranza, se non addirittura per la quasi totalità degli ascoltatori, la musica dell'opera era nuova'; Nordio, 'Dopo un secolo di silenzio: l'*Attila* di Verdi riesumato a Venezia', *Il popolo nuovo* (13 September 1951).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Beniamino Dal Fabbro, 'Carattere del XIV Festival di musica a Venezia', *Via 10* (October 1951), 17; Andrea Della Corte, 'Il mondan rumore internazionale per la nuova opera di Igor Strawinsky', *La nuova stampa* (8 September 1951); and Sandro Carletti, 'Strawinsky (in grande stile) e Verdi (in economia) al Festival di Venezia', *Rassegna dello spettacolo* (September-October 1951).

<sup>32</sup> 'Dai profondi archivi teatrali, uno alla volta emergono alla luce del cinquantenario le vecchie e dimenticate partiture di Giuseppe Verdi'; in Dal Fabbro, 'Al Festival musicale veneziano: primordiale e violento l'*Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi', *Il nuovo corriere* (13 September 1951). A few contradicted the need for remembering, claiming that Verdi had never been forgotten: the events were not intended to 'essere una commemorazione per chi lo abbia dimenticato. Per Lui ogni commemorazione è un pleonasma' (be a commemoration for those who have forgotten. Of Him every commemoration is a pleonasm); in *Mostra nella biblioteca nazionale di Napoli* (Naples, 1951), Catalogue for 'Nel cinquantesimo anniversario della morte di Giuseppe Verdi'.

<sup>33</sup> 'anche una esumazione nel programma verdiano, una formidabile esumazione: la mostra di tutte le partiture originali verdiane'; Sacchi, 'Ha inizio l'anno celebrativo'.

*d'Arco* and *Alzira*, both 1845). If the opera had enjoyed some success later into the 1850s—after a rather lacklustre premiere beset by technical problems—that was, many claimed, primarily due to its obvious political resonances. As to whether Verdi's opera could survive without such political efficacy, some countered that *Attila* could—that the music was worthy on its own terms (an appreciation enhanced by the opera being stripped down to an oratorio); others claimed that a decision could not be made without seeing the work fully staged. But there was clearly much at stake in deciding whether Verdi's opera was worthy of classic status—whether it could enter, as one critic put it, 'the museum of the field of opera'.<sup>34</sup> To answer positively *Attila's* perpetual contemporaneity needed to be endlessly reinforced: the opera was seen as inciting intense affective responses in the contemporary audience, just as it had supposedly done in 1846. The historical exegesis that was a feature of press reports was concerned with describing not just what the opera meant to its composer and original audience, but also the comparison this drew with what it conveyed to the contemporary public. In other words, there was simultaneously a need to expand the repertoire, while applying ideals of permanence and change, recuperation and accommodation to the present to operas such as *Attila*.<sup>35</sup>

Such raised stakes in deciding on *Attila's* inclusion in the operatic canon were in part the result of broader perceptions of opera crisis. Numerous press reports and journals released that year were devoted to the topic. The language that we have encountered in relation to Verdi was applied here too: was opera 'dead', its old relics in need of 'exhumation'? There were several strands to the issue: the shortage of new operas and the lack of relevance of older works to the present, as well as dwindling audience interest in the genre. Giuseppe Pugliese argued that the actual spaces for opera needed to be renewed: 'Theatre remains', he began, 'the most vexing and urgent question for music in our time, and the indefatigable search for new works is the surest evidence of the importance attributed to it'.<sup>36</sup> Pugliese went on to write that a new opera house, 'unmoored from inert traditionalism', needed to reflect postwar artistic

<sup>34</sup> 'da museo il campo dell'opera'; Emilia Zanetti, 'Al Festival musicale di Venezia: Strawinskij bilancia Verdi', *Fiera letteraria* (23 September 1951).

<sup>35</sup> My definition of the classic here is borrowed from Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanence and Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983 [1975]).

<sup>36</sup> 'Il teatro rimane l'interrogativo più assillante e urgente del nostro tempo musicale e la cura e la pazienza poste nella ricerca di opere nuove, sono la prova più sicura della importanza che tutti gli attribuiscono'; Giuseppe Pugliese, 'Opere opere opere opere opere opere opere per il Festival di Venezia', *La Scala* (15 March 1951), 31-33, here 31.

and social sensibilities. As to what such a theatrical culture would look like, he suggested—referring to the Venice festival—that contemporary music festivals were already starting to reflect these transformations, being simultaneously retrospective and modern. But, he noted, the Venice festival the previous year had stirred much controversy in replacing opera with ballet. In a country seen as synonymous with opera, this was a particularly polemical move. According to this trend, Pugliese claimed, ballet was to become ‘l’opera dell’avvenire’ (the work of the future), for:

Nell’epoca della bomba atomica, anzi della bomba H, degli aerei a reazione, il melodramma è un insopportabile avanzo archeologico. Solo il balletto, espressione attuale e viva dell’arte musicale contemporanea, può soddisfare le esigenze della civiltà atomica.<sup>37</sup>

[In the age of the atomic bomb, or rather the H-bomb, and of jet planes, opera is an unviable archaeological relic. Only ballet, the current and living expression of contemporary music, can meet the needs of atomic civilisation.]

Buried beneath the Cold War rhetoric were more pragmatic concerns: the jarring of older spectacles in a more austere present, the seemingly impossible economic demands of opera staging, and the capabilities of other genres for more timely expression.<sup>38</sup>

A 1951 special issue of the cultural journal *Ulisse* was also devoted to the theme of opera crisis. One contribution, by Giorgio Graziosi, offered cultural analysis similar to Pugliese’s.<sup>39</sup> In Graziosi’s account, however, the crisis was not primarily of production, but of reception.<sup>40</sup> The increasingly desperate search for new operas was yielding results: although the majority were failing to supersede older classics, that did not deny a certain vitality of contemporary operatic production. The problem was

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>38</sup> That ballet should be judged more timely than opera is something—as we saw in the Prologue—that goes back earlier in the century. In part, the preoccupation with the dance genre seems to have been because it avoided the burdensome rhetoric of opera crisis.

<sup>39</sup> Giorgio Graziosi claimed opera was—like a release from the Ministry of War—‘missing’ rather than necessarily dead. He located the moment it went ‘missing’ to the premieres of Berg’s *Wozzeck* (1925) and Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926). Intriguingly, he noted that the time of crisis in the aftermath of these works was one of ‘silence’; see Graziosi, ‘Il melodramma è morto?’, *Ulisse* 5/14 (April 1951), 154-59.

<sup>40</sup> This mode of critique seemingly puts the mid-twentieth-century perception of opera crisis at odds with its nineteenth-century predecessor; for more on the latter, see Francesca Vella, ‘Verdi Reception in Milan, 1859-1881: Memory, Progress and Italian Identity’ (Ph.D. dissertation: King’s College London, forthcoming 2014).

rather with the consumers: opera was now becoming the preserve of the elderly, increasingly out of touch with the postwar generation. But production was also at fault: according to Graziosi, opera as a genre was becoming ever less popular—a progressively more elite and esoteric entertainment in the face of a growing mass culture. Several aspects of Graziosi’s critique are worth drawing out here. First, he made a comparison between the decline of opera culture in the mid-century and the decline of religion in the increasingly secular society of the previous century. The result of the latter shift had been the cherishing of a residual faith (icons and relics), ‘of an earthly phenomenality: an object, therefore, of an easy faith—often degenerating into superstition, idolatry, belief in miracles’.<sup>41</sup> Such a ‘consecrated’ tradition was now evident, he claimed, in operatic culture—a positioning of Rossini, Verdi and Puccini as sacred aural vestiges of a previous age. The result was that ‘Verdi is already a myth, and the due aesthetic revaluation of Puccini is beginning’.<sup>42</sup>

The second aspect of Graziosi’s polemic was his analysis of the various reasons for opera’s decline. After surveying the terrain (‘artistic reasons’, cultural and social factors ‘of taste’, and ‘psychological reasons’),<sup>43</sup> Graziosi outlined what he believed were the three principal contributing factors: the dominance of radio, the increasing hegemony of the cinema and the ageing audiences of opera.<sup>44</sup> As with other commentators that year, his conclusion also invoked the notion of the sepulchral museum: ‘Today, witnessing the performances of operas, noticing the lack of such performances, and observing the apathy of the increasingly scarce and mummified public, you cannot entirely blame those who speak of commemorations and the opera

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<sup>41</sup> ‘di terrestre fenomenicità: oggetto, quindi, di una fede agevole, spesso degenerante nella superstizione, nell’idolatria, nel miracolismo’; Graziosi, ‘Il melodramma è morto?’, 156. As we have encountered, religious language was frequently used to describe Verdi and the events of 1951. One article, for example, stated that ‘Come Gesù, egli ha fatto un cenno, e ha moltiplicato all’infinito quel pugno di frumento, e ci ha sfamati e fatti crescere tutti, il caro e straordinario vecchio dall’aspetto, abitualmente, accigliato e burbero’ (Like Jesus, he has made a sign, and infinitely multiplied the handful of wheat; he has nourished and sustained them [the Italian people], this remarkable old man who so often appeared sullen and surly); in Vergani, ‘Il caro vecchio’.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Verdi è già un mito e la giusta rivalutazione estetica di Puccini si avvia’; Graziosi, ‘Il melodramma è morto?’, 156.

<sup>43</sup> The bad quality of performances was given as the artistic reasons; the predominance of visual spectacle, namely cinema and magazines, were reasons ‘di gusto’ (of taste); and the dominance of new media and advertising meant that older spectacles were losing their effectiveness (‘ragioni psicologiche’ (psychological reasons)); *ibid.*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Graziosi backed up these points with statistics and anecdotes suggesting opera’s dwindling popularity; he cited the case of a recent survey of Rome students aged 15–20 that found only about ten percent had ever seen an opera, and that they were all from privileged backgrounds; *ibid.*, 157.

house as an Opera Museum'.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, with Verdi as the figurehead of Italian operatic heritage, and his operas icons of popular sentiment, he in turn came to embody anxieties over opera crisis; if even Verdi's operas were no longer popular, then no Italian opera would be.

The relics in the museum were actual musical objects on display. Worthy of particular note in the 1951 commemorative literature were the exhibitions of autograph scores and other documents—attempts, to borrow Pierre Nora's phrase, 'to materialize the immaterial'.<sup>46</sup> Reporters repeatedly referred to the fact that the display in the Ridotto was the first time all the scores of Verdi's operas (apart from *Les vèpres siciliennes*, 1855) had been collected together in one place, the committees of the commemoration having 'preserved them for posterity's sake'.<sup>47</sup> The same critic went on to describe his experience of walking round in the 'total silence' of the exhibition, a reverential silence prompted by these collected texts.<sup>48</sup> Such interest in material traces was prompting calls for a complete critical edition of Verdi's operas—a call explicitly derived from seeing all the autograph scores on display.<sup>49</sup> Underpinning these calls was a concern for preserving recent scholarly and commemorative work: the application of 'un metodo filologico rigoroso' (a rigorous philological method) to the scores exhibited at the commemorative events, along with the addition of an historical introduction, reproductions of scenes and costumes, and performance notes, would provide useful documentation for future generations.<sup>50</sup> *Attila* was thus both a test case

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<sup>45</sup> 'Oggi, assistendo alle rappresentazioni di molte opere liriche, sentendo il freddo e l'insufficienza delle esecuzioni, e osservando l'apatia del sempre più scarso e mummificato pubblico non si può del tutto dar torto a chi ne parla come di commemorazioni e definisce il teatro d'opera Museo dell'Opera'; *ibid.*, 158.

<sup>46</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*', trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24, here 19.

<sup>47</sup> 'li conservò per l'amore dei posteri'; Abbiati, 'Gli ultimi segreti della creazione rivelati dalle partiture originali', *Corriere della sera* (27 January 1951).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, 'Note e commenti: primo bilancio della celebrazione verdiana in Italia', *La rassegna musicale* 25/3 (July 1951), 262-64. The calls for a critical edition within the context of a Verdi 'renaissance' is also discussed in Roberto Zanetti, 'Dopo il 1950', in *La musica italiana nel novecento*, vol. 2 (Busto Arsizio: Bramante, 1985), 1265-327.

<sup>50</sup> 'Note e commenti: primo bilancio della celebrazione verdiana in Italia'. The commentator also called for the writing of 'a biographical and critical monograph' to form part of the commemorative production mill, and to serve as a record of current scholarship for the future. Philology is also a practice, according to Gumbrecht, that seeks to amalgamate language and presence—to inscribe something not easily reducible to materiality; see Gumbrecht, 'Presence Achieved in Language (With Special Attention Given to the Presence of the Past)', *History and Theory* 45/3 (October 2006), 317-27.

and an exemplar of such labour, an embodiment of the increasingly urgent calls for opera's continuing potential.

### Commemorative continuities

Having considered one aspect of the concern for posterity bestowed on the 1951 *Attila* revival—that of exhuming a forgotten classic for the future—we might now turn to a second aspect of equal importance. This was also involved in the broader culture of stocktaking: a desire to rewrite the nation's past (often from competing, local perspectives). The Verdi commemoration formed part of a far larger trend, one intensified by the widespread sense of cultural crisis that the recent war and its aftermath had instilled.<sup>51</sup> Celebration induced introspection; or, as Adrian Lyttelton has written from the perspective of Risorgimento historiography: 'As the national past became an object of official celebration, it invited radical criticism and reinterpretation'.<sup>52</sup> Verdian discourse was incorporated into broader cultural debate on postwar renewal.

Commemorations and revivals spoke to the politics of renewal in the sense of distance between past and present they were seen both to reflect and inculcate. Critical writing on Verdi fifty years after his death was pervaded by an awareness of generational change. One writer claimed that bringing about such an awareness may have been the greatest achievement of the Verdi anniversary:

E la celebrazione del cinquantenario della morte di Verdi non sarà forse così interamente vana, com'è uso troppo frequente delle celebrazioni, se fin dal principio varrà a indurre a un esame di coscienza della nostra generazione, facendoci misurare così tangibilmente il dislivello storico tra la mentalità dei padri, che allora, sull'orlo d'una spirale di sciagure che ancora oggi ci tiene avvinti, commemorava in chiave di fiducioso ottimismo il centenario della sua nascita, e la nostra che, esperta di lutti e dubbiosa dell'avvenire, si raccoglie a celebrare il cinquantennio della sua morte con l'oscura coscienza di lamentare

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<sup>51</sup> Svetlana Boym claims that moments of nostalgia often follow from periods of political and social upheaval or revolution; in Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). That political fragility intensifies commemorative practices is part of John Gillis's theorisation of commemoration; see Gillis, 'Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship', in Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-24.

<sup>52</sup> Adrian Lyttelton, 'Creating a National Past: History, Myth and Image in the Risorgimento', in Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg, eds., *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivations of National Identity around the Risorgimento* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 27-63, here 63.

la scomparsa dell'ultimo testimone d'una generazione felice, di una schiatta d'uomini più forti, più sani, più interi, ma soprattutto, più felici.<sup>53</sup>

[The celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of Verdi's death may not be completely in vain, as such celebrations too frequently are, if from the outset they lead us to an examination of the conscience of our generation. At least they will not be in vain if they cause us to assess the historical distance between the mentality of our fathers, who commemorated the centenary of his birth in a spirit of confident optimism while on the brink of a spiral of disasters that even today hold us spellbound, and of our own mentality—grief-stricken and fearful of the future as we are—who have gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his death with the consciousness of having lost the last witness of a happier generation, of a lineage of men stronger, healthier, less fragmented, but above all, happier.]

The tone of the commemorations thus prompted a self-reflexive awareness of the state of the present generation as much as it did of previous conceptions of the composer and the original contexts of his music. A sense of distance enabled a renewed critical judgement, despite the opera's ongoing emotional charge. Yet, paradoxically, as we shall see, perceptions of rupture went against critical recognition of Verdi's ongoing popularity and the cultural continuity his music was thought to provide. Many critics claimed that a new chapter of the Verdi renaissance was under way, and a novel mode of criticism was either—depending on the view of the individual critic—emerging or desperately needed.<sup>54</sup> The underlying irony was that this 'ritorno a Verdi' coincided with the perceived moment of utmost crisis in operatic

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<sup>53</sup> Mila, 'Il mondo di Verdi', *L'Unità* (27 January 1951).

<sup>54</sup> Some commented that in fact Verdi was a more eminent cultural figure in 1951 than he had been at the time of his death; see, for example, Nordio, 'Tutto Verdi alla radio', *Gazzettino-sera* (20–21 January 1951), 4. Della Corte traced a continuity in the Verdi renaissance from the 1920s up to the present, but called for the still-unsatisfied need for a new mode of criticism to accompany it; see Della Corte, 'Nel panteon degli operisti', *La nuova stampa* (27 January 1951). The impact of the 1920s Verdi renaissance on that of the post-Second World War period was also discussed in Luigi Ronga, 'I critici', in Abbiati, ed., *Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Teatro alla Scala, 1951), 184–87. The composer Ildebrando Pizzetti stated, 'Che nel riprendere in esame e ristudiare l'opera totale di un grande artista i posteri possano scoprire e rimettere in luce valori deplorabilmente misconosciuti' (That in reprising the consideration and study of the entire oeuvre of a great artist, posterity can discover and bring to light values woefully misunderstood); Pizzetti, 'Giuseppe Verdi Maestro di Teatro', in Valerio Mariani, Riccardo Bacchelli and Pizzetti, eds., *Giuseppe Verdi nel cinquantenario della morte* (*Quaderno* 26, Celebrazione commemorativa promossa dall'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, dall'insigne Accademia di S. Luca e dall'Accademia di S. Cecilia, October–November 1951) (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1952), 14–27, here 17. For more on the earlier Verdi renaissance in Germany, see Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138–90.

culture.<sup>55</sup> Commentators pointed out that while Verdi's fortunes had continued to rise in the decades towards the mid-century, perceptions of opera crisis had grown increasingly severe from the 1930s.<sup>56</sup> For some, then, the composer was becoming an intriguing alternative for broader operatic discourse, a counterfactual to the state of opera. For others, however, an ongoing (and dwindling) audience for Verdi's operas was not enough to counteract claims of opera's demise.

The famous writer Massimo Bontempelli also wrote in 1951 of a Verdi renaissance. He too mentioned generational change, claiming that celebrating the composer was a way for current society to distance itself from its forefathers (in particular, the adulation of Wagner). Vacillations between the two composers in Italy thus became, he argued, a marker of each generation. Bontempelli claimed that these fluctuations had political connotations in the aftermath of Fascism: 'while the Wagnerian period fully exploded into the world and flourished in German imperialism, which concluded with Nazism, we found in Verdi the fundamental roots of a common humanity beyond races and political borders'.<sup>57</sup> In espousing the universalism of Verdi's music, critics such as Bontempelli sought to extricate the composer from more unsettling issues of continuity across the nation's recent past. The changing fortunes of Verdi and Wagner were also addressed in another article surveying the commemorative events of 1951: the anonymous writer noted that the early decades of the century were characterised by an 'antiverdismo', a sentiment that only began to wane with Arturo Toscanini's celebrated performances at La Scala in the early 1920s.<sup>58</sup> Generational change—as heightened by the statecraft of recent conflict—was central to the politics of postwar commemoration.

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<sup>55</sup> The phrase is discussed, for example, in André Schaeffner, 'Il "ritorno a Verdi": la fine del purgatorio', *La rassegna musicale* 21/3 (July 1951), 225-36.

<sup>56</sup> For example, see Pugliese, 'Opere opere opere opere opere opere opere per il Festival di Venezia'. Ivano Di Lillo provides evidence that between 1935 and 1943, Verdi was the most performed composer in Italy; see Di Lillo, 'Opera and Nationalism in Fascist Italy' (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Cambridge, 2012), 131. This suggests a change in operatic culture from the decades around the *fin-de-siècle*: as Axel Körner has shown, in Bologna between 1871 and 1914, Verdi was performed less than Wagner; see Körner, 'Music of the Future: Italian Theatres and the European Experience of Modernity between Unification and World War One', *European History Quarterly* 41/2 (2011), 189-212.

<sup>57</sup> 'e mentre il periodo wagneriano scoppiava in pieno sul mondo e fioriva in quell'imperialismo germanico che si concluse nel nazismo, noi ritrovammo in Verdi le fondamentali radici dell'umanità comune oltre le razze e i confini politici'; Massimo Bontempelli, 'Giuseppe Verdi genio rivoluzionario', *L'Unità* (2 February 1951). Bontempelli had been embroiled in discussion on music and opera crisis since the 1920s; for more on this, see the Prologue.

<sup>58</sup> 'Note e commenti: primo bilancio della celebrazione verdiana in Italia'.



If emphasising Verdi's universal humanity betrayed a deeper uneasiness over politically dubious continuities, it also suggested an uncertainty about Verdi's status as a 'popular' composer. As we have seen, there was an evident productivity to the commemoration: such a renaissance was in part enabled by the realisation of all Verdi's operas being present in the repertory, just as all the autograph scores were together in the same room. In addition, as we have seen, there was the attempt to see beyond time-worn value judgements and to reassess neglected works. However, underpinning this critical renaissance was a certain precariousness touched on in Graziosi's article cited earlier: a need endlessly to reinforce the composer as just as popular as he had ever been, to suggest that there were still audiences for these revivals and readerships for the newly-released material. In other words, that the populace still cared about a Verdi commemoration.<sup>59</sup>

In constantly reinforcing Verdi's popular appeal, critics betrayed an evident anxiety—in their emphatic rhetorical modes indicating that the situation was probably otherwise. Some took the surprising move (given the normally elitist and didactic nature of mid-century Italian music criticism), of trying to position themselves among the crowd. The novelist and cultural figure Dino Buzzati added his 'non-specialist' perspective to the discourse in just this way.<sup>60</sup> He outlined the process of artistic consumption by the public: although at first they tend to react negatively to a musical work, they later return and try to appreciate it (or at least pretend to), if they learn it is a work respected as a masterpiece. The case of Verdi, Buzzati argued, jarred with such modes of consumption: 'Verdi is excluded from the repertoire of the snob. Verdi is not chic, Verdi is not fashionable'.<sup>61</sup> The composer's unashamedly populist character thus rendered him immune from such social behaviours, making him a true artist of the people: a cultural 'Garibaldi', 'too popular, too unrefined, too instinctive, too easy' for the elite.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Correspondingly, commentators repeatedly demanded that critical editions and opera tickets should be fairly priced, to encourage as large a stratum of society as possible to purchase them.

<sup>60</sup> 'Qui non parla un critico. Ma semplicemente uno del pubblico' (Here does not speak a critic. But simply one of the public); Dino Buzzati, 'Difficoltà di Verdi', in Abbiati, ed., *Giuseppe Verdi*, 79-80, here 79.

<sup>61</sup> 'dal repertorio degli snob Verdi è ancora escluso. Verdi non è chic, Verdi non è di moda'; *ibid.*, 80.

<sup>62</sup> 'troppo popolare, troppo poco raffinato, troppo istintivo, troppo facile'; *ibid.*, 80. One way of further reinforcing Verdi's appeal to the masses was through promotional speeches. Orations to apparently vast and unwieldy crowds were, as we saw at the outset, at the centre of all commemorative events. This power of the voice to guide the populace has Fascist correlations: the 'historic' speech took on a new cogency under the regime, with the voice of the Duce seen as capable of conferring

Such critical anxiety over opera's dwindling popularity also points, as we shall see, to the shifting contours of what 'popular culture' had come to denote in postwar Italy. The intelligentsia—particularly in leftist discourse—seemingly failed to recognise that older cultural forms were being supplanted by the increasing dominance of new mass media. The Left were as a result trying to enforce a more nineteenth-century model of popular culture: one premised on local community, cultural tradition and national heritage. Critics also presumed popularity from the emotional effectiveness of Verdi's music. Amid narratives of destruction and despair at the nation's present predicament and the problematic historiographies of the past, the mythical status of Verdi and his music afforded a more positive vehicle for rewriting post-unification history. The fact that the Fascist regime had exploited an almost identical strategy only a decade earlier, at the state-sponsored fortieth anniversary celebrations, was conveniently forgotten. Thus despite protestations that the commemorative atmosphere of 1951 was appropriate to the postwar moment, the majority of critics' rhetorical modes were strikingly similar to Fascist eulogising at the earlier celebrations.<sup>63</sup>

There were other echoes and continuities across the decade: in 1941 Verdi's operas had also been deployed as a comforting continuity in a tumultuous time (then in the midst of war).<sup>64</sup> The contradictory qualities of his operas' universal humanity and quintessential Italianness were asserted, as well as claims to the emotional power of his music surviving his physical demise.<sup>65</sup> Verdi's belief in 'la patria' and his music's

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meaning on the past; for more on this, see Claudio Fogu, "To Make History": Garibaldianism and the Formation of a Fascist Historic Imaginary', in Ascoli and von Henneberg, *Making and Remaking Italy*, 203–40, here 230. These orations were often posthumously published; on the occasion of Verdi's death, there was, for example, Giuliano Renaroli's *Per la commemorazione di Giuseppe Verdi che la società dei concerti di Brescia fece nel Teatro Grande la sera del 28 marzo 1901* (Brescia: Rovetta, 1901); and Libero Fracassetti's *Giuseppe Verdi: parole commemorative* (Udine: Dorretti, 1901). Particularly for the Marxists and the post-Fascist nationalists, speeches became a way of reincarnating Verdi as channelling the will (Gramscian *volontarismo*) of the people—transforming those who listened from an unruly mob to a silently reverential crowd.

<sup>63</sup> For example: 'La commemorazione che il nostro tempo farà di Giuseppe Verdi sarà magari una commemorazione in tono minore, a voce bassa, senza retorica e, purtroppo, senza eloquenza. Una celebrazione in chiave di raziocinio più che in chiave di entusiasmo' (The commemoration of Giuseppe Verdi in our time will perhaps be a memorial in a more minor key, a quieter voice, without rhetoric, and unfortunately, without eloquence. A celebration in a key of common sense rather than of enthusiasm); Mila, 'Il mondo di Verdi'.

<sup>64</sup> Opera otherwise played a somewhat marginal role in Fascist musical culture, partly as a result of Mussolini's own stated lack of interest in the genre. For more on this, see Chapter One.

<sup>65</sup> For example, see a speech given by Maria Goretti, a philosophy teacher at the Regio Istituto Magistrale, in the Casa della Gioventù Italiana del Littorio in Bologna on 15 May 1941; in Goretti,

expressive representation of ‘il popolo’ were repeatedly mentioned. What is also striking is the sheer continuity of personnel: the roll calls of contributors to commemorative albums and monographs in 1941 were almost identical to those involved in the later celebrations.<sup>66</sup> For example, whereas in 1941 Bontempelli was writing material for Fascist pamphlets, by 1951—as we have seen—he was contributing articles on Verdi to the Communist newspaper *L’Unità*.<sup>67</sup> In Franco Abbiati’s 1951 edited volume, a speech given by Pietro Mascagni at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome for the 1941 celebrations was reproduced not, seemingly, as an historical document, but uncritically to corroborate the views of 1951.<sup>68</sup>

Commemorations had become a key strategy of Fascist historiography and cultural policy; aside from celebrations of their own founding myths, such as the *Decennale fascista* (the tenth anniversary of the Fascist ‘revolution’), a particular prominence was given to remembering aspects of the Risorgimento.<sup>69</sup> This remembering centred on re-inscribing heroic figures of the period, such as the *Cinquantenario garibaldino* (the fiftieth anniversary of Garibaldi’s death in 1932). As a result of being primarily state-sponsored, such events became sites of political contestation. Simultaneous with attempts by the Fascists to style heroes of the Risorgimento as their own precursors, from the 1930s the anti-Fascist Left also sought to rewrite the national past for their own purposes. Luigi Salvatorelli of the Partito d’Azione (a conglomerate of anti-Fascist groups), published in 1943 the pro-Mazzinian volume *Pensiero e azione del Risorgimento*, in which he interpreted Fascism as an ‘antirisorgimento’, counterpoised to unificatory ideals.<sup>70</sup> Yet Verdi remained a potent cultural mediator of historical rewriting and Risorgimento rememberings. The perceived immortality of his music—and the myths circulating about Verdi’s own

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*Giuseppe Verdi. Commemorazione tenuta nella casa della G. I. L. di Bologna il 15 maggio 1941–XIX* (Bologna: Luigi Parma, 1941), 5–6.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the index of contributors to Giuseppe Mulè, ed., *Verdi. Studi e memorie*, Sindacato nazionale fascista musicisti nel XL anniversario della morte (Rome: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1941): Mulè, Roberto Farinacci, Bontempelli, Della Corte, Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Fernando L. Lunghi, Alceo Toni, Alfredo Parente, Guido Pannain, Adriano Lualdi, Ronga and Adelmo Damerini.

<sup>67</sup> Bontempelli, ‘Giuseppe Verdi genio rivoluzionario’.

<sup>68</sup> In particular, to emphasise Verdi’s popular appeal despite critical disapproval; see Pietro Mascagni, ‘Nel quarantesimo della morte’, in Abbiati, ed., *Giuseppe Verdi*, 209–12.

<sup>69</sup> The philosopher Giovanni Gentile was a major proponent of the historiography that sought a linear narrative between the Risorgimento and Fascism; see Gentile, *I profeti del Risorgimento italiano* (Florence: Sansoni, 1944 [1923]).

<sup>70</sup> Luigi Salvatorelli, *Pensiero e azione del Risorgimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1950 [1943]), 189.

political incitements—meant that he became a key discursive space for coming to terms with the nation's past.<sup>71</sup>

## Emotional historiographies

In the aftermath of war, an analysis of the Risorgimento—and the way Verdi's music might be used—could not but betray political sensitivities.<sup>72</sup> Within Verdi scholarship, the composer's role in unification was being reconstructed and myths re-inscribed; within Risorgimento scholarship, this was a period of rewriting the history of unification in light of recent events. What Lucy Riall has called the 'retrospective shadow' of Fascism and war prompted a desire for the creation of a new national past, one premised more often than not on the role of Risorgimento icons.<sup>73</sup> The shadow haunted a polarised debate: the creation of a past that either in its espousal of heroism and glory showed the last few decades to be an anomaly, or that instead traced the roots of recent Fascist and wartime failure into the previous century. These lines of enquiry were exemplified by the publications of an idealist text by Benedetto Croce and an historical materialist text by Antonio Gramsci.<sup>74</sup> Whereas Croce argued that the Fascist period had been a 'parenthesis' in the nation's history, Gramsci argued that in fact it had deeper roots in the failures of nineteenth-century unification. Michele Abbate argued, furthermore, that Croce as an ongoing reference point in current philosophical thought was both instigating and propagated by perceptions of crisis. The crisis was twofold: on the one hand, a widespread crisis of postwar Italian society, and on the other, a specifically historiographical crisis resulting from the stultifying,

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<sup>71</sup> The patterns of Fascist-sponsored commemorative activity mirror those a decade later: orations were given and published; articles and books specially written; correspondence and facsimiles released; exhibitions of memorabilia inaugurated; and revivals and performances staged. For examples of books, see Gatti, ed., *Verdi nelle immagini* (Milan: Garzanti, 1941) and Mulè, ed., *Verdi. Studi e memorie*, for published orations and articles, see Abbiati, 'Inesauribile potenza della musica verdiana', *Corriere della sera* (26 January 1941) and Alessandro Luzio, 'Quarant'anni dopo la morte di Verdi', *Corriere della sera* (26 January 1941).

<sup>72</sup> For a contemporary overview of competing histories and analyses of the Risorgimento, see Nino Valeri, Gabriele Pepe, Chabod, Domenico Demarco and Gino Luzzato, eds., *Orientamenti per la storia d'Italia nel Risorgimento* (Bari: Amici della Cultura, 1952).

<sup>73</sup> Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

<sup>74</sup> See Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1951* (Bari: Laterza, 1928) and Antonio Gramsci, *Il Risorgimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1949). Croce had been a staunch supporter of Fascism until 1925; thereafter he became a hero of the liberal anti-Fascists. For more on Croce's political vacillations, see Dennis Mack Smith, 'Benedetto Croce: History and Politics', *Journal of Contemporary History* 1 (1973), 41-61.

all-pervasive influence of Croce and the need to move away from his idiosyncratic liberalism.<sup>75</sup>

Simultaneous with Verdian mythmaking, then, was an acute awareness of the inevitable politicisation of such historiographical processes. An article published at the end of the previous year focussed on the factional nature of contemporary writing on Verdi. The author—Giuseppe Cacciola—claimed that with the forthcoming anniversary, ‘We will hear the deafening drum beat of official culture, the uttering of a cliché that today should be approached with great caution: Verdi as an animator, patriot, the instigator of powerful revolutionary outbursts against the brutal oppression by Austria’.<sup>76</sup> In other words, one needed to look beyond the state rhetoric that sought to reinforce Verdi as a national hero if one wanted a more historically accurate picture. Cacciola went on to warn of the ‘easy patriotic oratory’ that could be created from Verdi’s ‘Dionysian’ effects.<sup>77</sup> The co-opting of Verdi’s supposed humanity for different political ends thus rendered transparent the entrenched divisions of politicised postwar historiography.

Other leftist commentators emphasised Verdi as a man of the people, his recourse to an apparent realism rendering his operas as the incitement and aesthetic re-enactment of class struggle, his choruses the manifestation of the crowd. This dangerous potential was something, the Left claimed, that the state status quo (by this time the Democrazia Cristiana (DC)) endeavoured to suppress under a rhetoric of Verdi working with the nation state rather than against it. As the composer and critic Mario Zafred wrote, reiterating the warning of Cacciola’s critique:

la schiettezza e la convinzione, del contadino di Roncole derivavano da un attaccamento concreto alla realtà ... Per queste ragioni siamo profondamente convinti che le celebrazioni di oggi, circoscritte nel loro ambito celebrativo ai toni ufficiali, non bastino se veramente si vuole onorare Verdi nel

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<sup>75</sup> Michele Abbate, *La filosofia di Benedetto Croce e la crisi della società italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Sentiremo la grancassa della cultura ufficiale battere, in maniera assordante, le note di un luogo comune che oggi dovrebbe essere considerato con molta cautela: quello di un Verdi animatore, patriottico, suscitatore di poderosi impeti rivoluzionari contro la feroce oppressione austriaca’; Giuseppe Cacciola, ‘La “politicalità” di Giuseppe Verdi’, *Rivista musicale italiana* 52 (1950), 183-85, 183.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

cinquantenario della sua morte. Grande artista del popolo, contadino fino al midollo ... Figlio del popolo, egli sarà celebrato degnamente solo allora.<sup>78</sup>

[the clarity and the conviction of the farmer from Le Roncole were derived from a concrete attachment to reality ... For these reasons, we strongly believe that today's celebrations, confined within the official celebratory tone, are not enough if you truly want to honour the fiftieth anniversary of Verdi's death. Great artist of the people, a farmer through and through ... Son of the people, he will be celebrated worthily only then.]

While also reinforcing Verdi as a man of the people, rightwing commentators took a rather different tack. For them, the composer instead afforded a means of effacing the present and retreating into a nostalgia for the nation's earliest moments, while simultaneously reinforcing Verdi's operas as symbols of nationalist vision and harmony.<sup>79</sup> The composer was thus again invoked as a cultural counterpart to Garibaldi—an icon created through competing and conflicting discourses.<sup>80</sup> There was even an incongruity nestled at the heart of the similarities shared by both ends of the political spectrum: of Verdi as a man of the people—a humble farmer from Le Roncole—and also as an embodiment of transcendent religiosity.<sup>81</sup>

Recent scholarship has uncovered how the image of Verdi as 'bard of the Risorgimento' primarily emerged after unification.<sup>82</sup> Significant for our purposes here is how the aftermath of war and Fascism seemed to reignite an interest in both

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<sup>78</sup> Mario Zafred, 'Cinquanta anni dalla morte di un grande musicista popolare: nella musica di Verdi gli affanni e le speranze umane', *L'Unità* (27 January 1951). Another article in *L'Unità* quoted an oration delivered by Shostakovich, in which the composer had drawn a connection between Verdi's operas and Soviet realism: 'per il suo contenuto realistico, per l'autentico umanesimo di cui è pregna' (for its realistic content, for the authentic humanism that it is steeped in); 'Luigi Einaudi presenzia a Milano la solenne commemorazione di Verdi', *L'Unità* (28 January 1951).

<sup>79</sup> Mila referred to this tendency of the Right when he wrote that certain sectors of the press were using the celebrations as an opportunity to 'negare l'aspra realtà presente in nome di un passato purtroppo irrevocabile' (deny the harsh reality of the present in the name of an irrevocable past); Mila, 'Il mondo di Verdi'.

<sup>80</sup> For a recent account of the creation of the mythic figure of Garibaldi, see Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> The idolisation of such figures of the past (especially as a form of Fascist policy), was subject to critique by Gramsci, who saw hero-worship as instilling a teleological determinism and thus dangerous passivity among the public; see Gramsci, *Quaderno del carcere*, vol. 3, ed. V. Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 2007 [1949]), 2109.

<sup>82</sup> See Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982 [1962]), Roger Parker, *Leonora's Last Act* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Parker, 'Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati': *The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1997). For recent reviews of this literature, see Parker, 'Verdi Politico: A Wounded Cliché Regroups', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012), 427-36; and Mary Ann Smart, 'Magical Thinking: Reason and Emotion in Some Recent Literature on Verdi and Politics', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012), 437-47.

investigating and to some extent creating the part played by Verdi's operas in national unification. Numerous texts had been published on Verdi and the Risorgimento over the preceding decades, not least sponsored by the regime.<sup>83</sup> Yet the commemorations of 1951 prompted a renewed flourishing of scholarship and criticism. There were two primary concerns: beyond the recuperation and revival of forgotten operas, there was the reconstruction of their patriotic meaning (regardless of a paucity of evidence). Revisionist literature has tended to focus on texts from later in the decade, such as Franco Abbiati's four-volume biography of 1959. Much of the patriotic rewriting of these narratives, however, stemmed from the scholarship surrounding the 1951 commemoration. Abbiati's earlier edited volume *Giuseppe Verdi* (1951), for example, isolated the aspects of Verdi's operas seen as representative of his patriotic zeal— aspects used as evidence in the later biography: the operas as universal and Italian; vocal music as inciting communal emotion; the impetuosity of Verdi's style exhibiting his heroism for *la patria*. Most importantly, however, it was the specific rhetoric of crisis postwar—both of opera and more generally of social and cultural life—that prompted the re-inscribing of Verdi and *Attila* as metonyms for Risorgimento politics, the metonymic presence inscribed and instilled in the service of broader historical stocktaking.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed in the reception of *Attila* critics failed to take notice of Cacciola's earlier warning (being wary of the opera's 'Dionysian' effects): across the reviews there was an emphasis on the opera's original political cogency, combined with a sense that despite the dramatically different political context postwar, *Attila* continued to inspire a great depth of emotional response.<sup>85</sup> The opera's capacity to move the public led critics to reconsider Verdi's affective role in the Risorgimento. The once ubiquitous nineteenth-century description of Verdi as the 'Maestro della rivoluzione italiana' was repeatedly re-deployed, the operas seen as the emotional vehicles of that status.<sup>86</sup> Verdi

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<sup>83</sup> For examples of Fascist-period texts that emphasised the patriotic resonance of Verdi's operas, see Gino Monaldi, *Verdi, 1839-1898* (Turin: Bocca, 1926); Gatti, *Verdi*; and Gino Roncaglia, *L'ascensione creatrice di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1940).

<sup>84</sup> For more on the idea of metonymy transcribing presence regardless of any authorial intention, see Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory* 45/1 (February 2006), 1-29.

<sup>85</sup> As one critic put it: 'Ad ogni modo tutt'altro che trascurabile è l'apporto non solo culturale ma anche emotivo dell'opera' (In any case far from negligible is not only the work's cultural but emotional contribution); see lu-ci, 'Sulle onde della radio: *La forza del destino* e *Attila*', *Il popolo nuovo* (18 September 1951).

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Nordio, 'È ritornato alla Fenice l'*Attila* senza brandò', *Gazzettino-sera* (13-14 September 1951).

was again reinforced as a potent symbol of national progress, of glory and heroism, against notions of backwardness, reaction, and political and emotional oppression. Questions were raised as to whether its earlier political efficacy had survived and to the possibilities of separating the emotional significance of Verdi's music from the revolutionary politics of its 'Risorgimento allegory'.<sup>87</sup>

Many critics sought to locate surviving political residues in musical detail, claiming that the gestural qualities of the music had a certain historical topicality. They repeated anecdotes that these allusions were what had incited the audience to rise up at the premiere, despite scarce evidence in the reception.<sup>88</sup> Some critics claimed that in the politically fraught climate of 1846, single literary phrases alone had provoked outpourings from those present:

Il '48 si avvicinava. Le speranze degli italiani si erano ridestate in un'atmosfera incandescente; impeti di ribellione serpeggiavano per tutta la Penisola. E quando in teatro si udirono risonare frasi come quelle che Ezio grida all'Unno invasore ('Avrai tu l'universo—resti l'Italia a me'), o come l'ammonimento di Odabella ('Ma noi, noi donne italiche,—cinte di ferro il seno,—sul fulgido terreno—sempre vedrai pagnar'), o come l'invocazione di Foresto ('Cara patria...—vivrai più superba, più bella,—della terra e dell'orbe stupor'), frenetiche e incontenibili grida di passione eruppero da tutti i petti, in un delirio di commozione irrefrenabile; e forse nessuno allora si soffermò a considerare se le parole avevano un adeguato rilievo nell'espressione musicale.<sup>89</sup>

[1848 was approaching. The hopes of Italians had reawakened in an incandescent atmosphere: outbursts of rebellion emerged across the peninsula. And when, in the theatre, phrases such as Ezio's cries at the Hun invader ('Avrai tu l'universo—resti l'Italia a me'), or the admonition of Odabella ('Ma noi, noi donne italiche,—cinte di ferro il seno,—sul fulgido terreno—sempre vedrai pagnar'), or the invocation of Foresto ('Cara patria...—vivrai più superba, più bella,—della terra e dell'orbe stupor'), were heard, frenetic, uncontrollable cries of passion erupted from all breasts in a delirium of uncontrollable emotion, and perhaps no one then paused to consider whether the words had an adequate level of musical expression.]

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<sup>87</sup> Smart describes *Attila's* plot metaphors and resonances as 'Risorgimento allegory', in 'Liberty On (and Off) the Barricades: Verdi's Risorgimento Fantasies', in Ascoli and von Henneberg, eds., *Making and Remaking Italy*, 103-18, here 110.

<sup>88</sup> There is little evidence that the premiere had overt resonances for contemporary audiences. Douglas L. Ipson has recently tried to argue that it did, but his essay mainly relies on supposition ('it is quite simply unimaginable' and 'it is hard to see how any Italian ... audience in the 1840s would not have understood Verdi's *Attila* in patriotic terms'); Ipson, 'Attila takes Rome: The Reception of Verdi's Opera on the Eve of Revolution', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21/3 (November 2009), 249-56.

<sup>89</sup> Lu-ci, 'Sulle onde della radio: *La forza del destino e Attila*'.



The inference about lack of musical quality was crucial here: at the time of the premiere the music had been subservient to the topicality of the text. Now with such political efficacy diminished, it was the music that demanded critical reappraisal. The present moment was, after all, markedly different, a point used by the opera's detractors as well as its advocates: one Gabriella Bemporad wrote that despite 'una attualità che bruciava' (a burning topicality) for original listeners and the 'slanci risorgimentali' (Risorgimental outbursts) that the opera supposedly inspired, heated political sentiments were now diffused into a mediocre libretto and music marred by passé politics.<sup>90</sup> Yet for many the opera maintained an emotional resonance. This led critics to a conundrum: despite the extinguished political efficacy of a previously resonant libretto, the opera continued to inspire emotion. The task many set themselves was to try to locate the ongoing power specifically in the music—'di suoni evocatori di memorie' (of sound evoking memories), and look beyond direct textual allusion.<sup>91</sup>

Most focussed on the sonic effects of the two *concertati* that conclude the first and second acts, with critics analysing the nexus between sound and emotion that they were seen to pose. The sections were interpreted as an abstract musical embodiment of the emotion Verdi inspired—something seen to reside in harmony and rhythm rather than of plot or libretto, and, above all, in the interplay of multiple voices.<sup>92</sup> Whereas earlier *concertati*, such as those by Rossini, functioned as an appendage to a dramatic moment, with Verdi—critics noted—they came to serve an inherently dramatic function themselves. The drama was a dual polyphony: in the sheer complexity of enmeshed vocal lines and in the multifarious musical purposes of the section.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> For 'i suoi valori intrinseci sono piuttosto patriottici che estetici' (its intrinsic values are patriotic rather than aesthetic); in Gabriella Bemporad, 'Il XIV Festival di musica a Venezia: Verdi è sempre Verdi, anche in *Attila* opera minore', *La voce repubblicana* (19 September 1951).

<sup>91</sup> The phrase is from an oration by Giuseppe Giacosa given at La Scala on 1 February 1901, as part of the commemoration of Verdi's death; reprinted in Giovanni Cenzato, *Itinerari verdiani* (Parma; Ceschina, 1955 [1949]), 231.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Abbiati, 'Il Festival musicale di Venezia: l'*Attila* di Verdi eseguito in forma d'oratorio', *Corriere della sera* (13 September 1951).

<sup>93</sup> 'l'accumulo delle voci che convergono nella realizzazione dell'armonia complessiva, e nello stesso tempo cercano di conservare una distinta fisionomia espressiva e drammatica grazie alla diversità dei ritmi e degli accenti' (the accumulation of voices that converge in the overall realisation of harmony, and at the same time are trying to maintain a distinct expressive and dramatic physiognomy thanks to the diversity of rhythms and accents); Mila, 'Stagione lirica della Radio Italiana: un'opera verdiana del "periodo oscuro"', *Radiocorriere* (9-15 September 1951).

The *concertati* were based on an interaction of multitudinous musical voices that played with divisions between individual and crowd (see Example 1): on a prosaic level pitting the soloists against the chorus, but on another suggesting the individuals as symbolic of humanity.<sup>94</sup> Here the medley of voices begin *sottovoce*, before reaching a rousing climax. Moments of large-scale communal singing were seen as embodying the sheer power of sound, as well as the vigorous politics of noise. Being devoid of scenery and action made the sound world created by the interplay of voices only more fundamental to critics' interpretations of *Attila's* aesthetic. Indeed for many the aural drama was an 'azione quasi visiva' (almost visual action) that created the opera's 'travolgente efficacia' (rousing effect).<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, this made the *concertati* a focus of aural memory: they mobilised the affections central to historical remembering, the musically-formed relationship between drama and emotion thus key to understanding the ongoing efficacy of the opera.

Emphasising the sheer power of sound as the music's distinctive trait also betrayed a populist motive: it stressed the visceral over the intellectual, suggesting that the effects of Verdi's music could be *felt* without necessarily being understood.<sup>96</sup> The brash noise of the *concertati's* musical surface resisted attempts at interpretation of underlying processes; as Julian Budden has written: '*Attila* is the heaviest and noisiest of the Risorgimento operas, blunt in style, daubed in thick garish colours'.<sup>97</sup> And it was here at once that *italianità* and humanity cohered: that purely aural moments could carry an ultimately un-analysable emotional power inferred a certain ineffability. *Attila* was perceived as embodying its original culture and history as metonymical symbols, while simultaneously escaping those confines—gesturing beyond the words of the

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<sup>94</sup> 'i casi particolari di Attila, di Odabella, di Ezio e di Foresto diventano i casi generali della tirannia, dell'amor di patria, della resistenza, della prudenza, della ribellione e si definiscono nelle arie, nei duetti e soprattutto nei concertati' (the particular cases of Attila, Odabella, Ezio and Foresto become general cases of tyranny, patriotism, resistance, prudence and rebellion, and are defined in the arias, duets and above all in the *concertati*); Mario Labroca, 'Attila—nel mito storico verdiano', in the programme booklet for the production of *Attila* by the XIV Festival internazionale di musica contemporanea e V Autunno musicale veneziano; held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice [Misc. D. 6571].

<sup>95</sup> Lunghi, 'Il Festival musicale di Venezia: l'*Attila* di Verdi in edizione radiofonica', *Il giornale d'Italia* (14 September 1951).

<sup>96</sup> And this was seemingly despite the fact that the lack of visual elements might be seen to make the experience more esoteric. The possibility for political agendas and manipulation of memory when emotion is invoked is discussed by Nora: 'Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it'; Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996 [1984-92]), 3.

<sup>97</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 1 (London: Cassell, 1973), 265.

libretto and the messy political ramifications to a musically-instilled universal humanity.

FOR. *ANDANTINO* ♩ = 69

EZIO (ad Attila) *sottovoce*

*sottovoce* **Rammenta i miei**

R  
O  
C

Lo spir - to de' mon - ti ne rug - ge al - le fron - ti, le  
 Lo spir - to de' mon - ti ne rug - ge al - le fron - ti, le  
 Lo spir - to de' mon - ti ne rug - ge al - le fron - ti, le

*ANDANTINO* ♩ = 69 *pp*

F  
E

spo - sa, t'al - lie - ta, è giun - ta la me - ta, de' pa - dri lo scempio ven -  
 patti, con Ezio combatti; del vecchio guer - rie - ro  
 quer - cie fu - man - ti sua ma - no co - pri.  
 quer - cie fu - man - ti sua ma - no co - pri.  
 quer - cie fu - man - ti sua ma - no co - pri.

*p*

ODA. (da sè)

Ven-det - ta a - vrem noi per ma - no de'

- det - ta ot - - ter - rà, è giunta la meta,

la mano non sprezzar, con Ezio combatti,

M'irriti, o Ro - mano... sorprendermi è

*sottovoce* Ter - ro - re, mi - ste - ro, ter -

*sottovoce* Ter - ro - re, mi - ste - ro, ter -

Ter - ro - re, mi - ste - ro, ter -

*pp*

O suoi? non fi a ch'è - gli cada pel

de' padri lo scempio ven - detta otter -

del vecchio guerrier la man non sprezzar,

vano: o cre - di che il vento m'in -

- ro - re, mi - ste - ro sul - l'a - ni - ma ha im -

- ro - re, mi - ste - ro sul - l'a - ni - ma ha im -

- ro - re, mi - ste - ro sul - l'a - ni - ma ha im -

The image shows a page of a musical score for Verdi's opera *Attila*. It features five vocal staves labeled O (Oboe), F (Flute), U (Ultrasoprano), E (Alto), and A (Bass), and a piano accompaniment at the bottom. The music is in G major and 2/4 time. The lyrics are: "lo - ro tra...dir, -rà... Ah!", "fon - da ter\_ror? o cre.di che il ven -", and "-pe - - ro...". The score includes dynamic markings like *ff* and *8*.

Musical Example 1: *Attila* by Verdi.

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## Radio opera

This optimistic reading of the *concertati*'s nexus between sound and emotion was not shared by all critics. That the sections apparently did not rely on visual action, but rather on the aural drama of a crowd of voices, would surely have lent *Attila* to radio dissemination. Although many critics were ideologically unwilling to adopt this perspective, radio's potential as a mediator of opera could not be dismissed altogether. Central to attempts to reinforce the popularity of Verdi's operas was the exploitation of mass media to aid dissemination. Radio italiana launched a 'ciclo verdiano' for the anniversary year: twenty-four of Verdi's works were to be played on air, and a series of talks and programmes broadcast.<sup>98</sup> Special transmissions were designed for schools and factories; vehicles with appropriate sound equipment were sent out across the country 'facilitare l'ascolto collettivo' (to facilitate collective listening) among factory

<sup>98</sup> This cycle alone, many noted, was a worthy feat: 'Quale teatro, anche il più grande del mondo, avrebbe potuto allestire una Stagione verdiana di quest'ampiezza?' (Which theatre, even the largest in the world, could set up a Verdi Season of this magnitude?); Nordio, 'Tutto Verdi alla radio'.

workers.<sup>99</sup> *Attila* was first broadcast on the Terzo programma (an arts programme modelled on the BBC's Third Programme) on 13 September.<sup>100</sup> Most commentators could not deny the importance for a populist agenda of the fact that those who were not able to travel to or could not afford to attend the Venetian performance were now able to hear the opera, and, at a distance, be part of the event.

Despite declarations of an opera crisis underpinned by the art form's dwindling popularity, critics noted, the radio meant that opera was reaching a wider demographic than any other in living memory. More people could now listen to more operas, more frequently.<sup>101</sup> The 'ciclo verdiano' allowed one to hear all the operas, just as the exhibition of autograph scores had put them all on display. This not only further fuelled calls of a 'ritorno a Verdi', but also reinforced a populist agenda to the new mode of criticism; as one critic put it, 'the arbitrary nature of the relationship that exists between specialist judges and a public that must rely on what they say is about to end thanks to the radio'.<sup>102</sup> In other words, new forms of distribution were affecting critics' power, as well as the actual nature of their discourse. Now that the public could listen to performances themselves, even in the comfort of their homes, there was no need to rely exclusively on the opinions of the press. This empowerment of the ordinary listener was noted by Buzzati:

Da notare che la generalità del pubblico 'colto', constatando come i propri gusti autentici e istintivi divergono dal giudizio dell'*élite*, ha imparato a diffidare di sé stessa. Troppe volte ha visto condannare come triviali certe musiche di suo segreto godimento. E dall'esperienza ha tratto una norma prudenziale: *diffidare da ciò che piace troppo*.<sup>103</sup>

[It should be noted that the general 'cultured' public, finding that their authentic and instinctive tastes differ from the judgement of the elite, has learned to distrust itself. Too many times they have seen condemned as trivial certain kinds of music that they secretly enjoy. And the experience has provided a prudent rule: *distrust what they like too much*.]

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<sup>99</sup> Unsurprisingly, this policy was mostly reported in the leftist press: see, for example, Mila, 'Il mondo di Verdi'.

<sup>100</sup> It was then broadcast again on Rete azzurra on 18 September, and finally on Rete rossa on 7 October.

<sup>101</sup> For a history of the radio in Italy, see Guido Gola, *Tra pubblico e privato. Breve storia della radio in Italia* (Turin: Effata, 2003).

<sup>102</sup> 'l'arbitrarietà del rapporto che passa tra gli specialisti giudicanti e il pubblico che deve giurare sul loro verbo, sta per finire: grazie alla radio'; V. Incauda, 'La radio: una prima assoluta', *Idea* (30 September 1951).

<sup>103</sup> Buzzati, 'Difficoltà di Verdi', 80.

For critics who shared this line of argument, such democratisation of taste made the medium only more appropriate for the broadcasting of *Attila*; as we have seen, the opera's supposed visceral and emotional rather than intellectual appeal was judged to render critical judgement superfluous.

Along with this increased power of public taste was the broadening of knowledge that widespread dissemination and acquaintance could achieve. As one critic wrote, 'If one had not had the radio, wanting to know all these things, one would be forced to read countless scores and books borrowed or purchased at great cost, and to travel from theatre to theatre'.<sup>104</sup> Cost was crucial here: radio was seen as a more democratic means in precisely these terms, and this was deemed more important for some members of the press than safeguarding an older mode of music criticism.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, regardless of whether empowerment actually happened, most striking is that the very critics who were supposedly being disempowered reinforced the new possibilities for audience appreciation—as if they knew their own obsolescence was crucial to opera's survival. This situation was particularly fraught for the leftist press: while empowerment of the masses and economic democratisation were core values, the Left in Italy had long had a tradition of guiding intellectuals. Forsaking their position of power as a critic also meant forsaking their political position.

A series of paradoxes and conflicts were nestled in perceptions of radio-led democratisation. *Attila* on radio in 1951 was seen as enabling more local commemoration, while also forming nationwide aesthetic experiences—something deemed important in the aftermath of war. Those in the provinces could now enjoy the same aesthetic experiences that were previously the preserve of those who inhabited metropolitan centres. 'Chi avrebbe potuto credere che nel centenario [*sic*] di Verdi', one critic claimed,

ci sarebbe stato possibile udire tutte le opere del maestro dalla prima all'ultima, non dirò a Roma o a Milano, ma in provincia? E nel più remoto angolo d'Italia

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<sup>104</sup> 'Se non avesse avuto la Radio, volendo conoscere tutte queste cose, sarebbe stato costretto a leggere spartiti e libri innumerevoli presi a prestito o acquistati a caro prezzo, e a peregrinare da teatro a teatro'; Goffredo Bellonci, 'Un anno di Terzo programma', *La Scala* (15 November 1951).

<sup>105</sup> It is somewhat ironic that radio should be seen as a democratic means of dissemination when it had been so used as an instrument of Fascism; for more on this, see Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Italy: Tradition, Backwardness and Modernity', in Zygmunt Barański and Robert Lumley, eds., *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 50-62.

il più modesto lavoratore le ha quest'anno ascoltate alla radio con i commenti dei più dotti e acuti critici.<sup>106</sup>

[Who would have believed that at the centenary celebrations [*sic*] of Verdi, we would have been able to hear all the works of the maestro from the first to the last, not just in Rome and Milan, but in the provinces? And in the most remote corner of Italy, the modest worker heard on the radio this year the commentaries of the most learned and acute critics.]

Critics' authority was not entirely forsaken: 'the modest worker' was also to be aided by the mass of supporting material released by every available media outlet—telegrams, press releases, newspaper articles, as well as the issuing of commemorative periodicals, essays, monographs, documents and correspondence, the use of photography and later release of the revival on record.

There was a second, more future-orientated concern, however, to such exploitation of the media: of ensuring the commemoration was recorded for posterity. One critic, for example, wrote that several years previously he had written an open letter to Toscanini, 'sul miglior modo di onorare Verdi' (on the best way to honour Verdi) (in *La rassegna musicale*, July 1949). The 'best way', the critic concluded, was a 'disco fonografico' (phonographic record), so that the conductor's 'wise interpretation of Verdi' could be 'passed on from generation to generation'.<sup>107</sup> There was the awareness that *Attila* as a radio broadcast meant that it too could later be committed to record and thus become an artefact for future generations—material for subsequent exhibitions. Media—especially emergent, mass media—could thus be employed to keep a record of commemorative work.

But the use of media to record and perpetuate the Verdi myth also instilled anxiety over the reliance on such means of dissemination. Some were openly sceptical of the media's role in the commemorations, and the possibility of alleviating opera crisis. Graziosi tried to temper more idealist accounts with an appraisal of the reality: 'The advent of radio, which, by disseminating operas in every home, in every social class and in every country, was to refresh and stimulate interest in this spectacle,

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<sup>106</sup> Bellonci, 'Un anno di Terzo programma'.

<sup>107</sup> 'chiedevamo a Toscanini di darci, nel disco fonografico, affinché noi potessimo trasmetterlo ai nostri nipoti ... si tramandi di generazione in generazione'; 'Note e commenti: primo bilancio della celebrazione verdiana in Italia', 262-63.



bringing people back to the theatre: that has not happened'.<sup>108</sup> Despite repeated critical calls about radio's possibility for rejuvenating opera—the litmus test of the 1951 events did not seem to yield entirely positive results.

Radio mediation of *Attila* also posed its own aesthetic problems, heightened by the fact the opera was performed in concert. Consensus was unequivocal: performing *Attila* as an 'oratorio' was only to its detriment; one critic even claimed that, 'Presenting Verdi in the form of an oratorio is like admiring in black and white a painting by Tiepolo'.<sup>109</sup> However, the uneasiness at the concert format went deeper still. Another wrote of how audiences were growing disconcertingly used to a new aesthetic experience:

Siamo oramai abituati ad ascoltare le opere verdiane per radio. Le percepiamo, consapevoli che in tale forma la musica appare scissa artificialmente della sua cornice naturale; nell'ascoltarla cerchiamo di completare la trasmissione con uno sforzo d'immaginazione, ricostruendo in mente lo sfondo sul quale la musica risuona nel teatro.<sup>110</sup>

[We are now used to hearing Verdi's operas on the radio. We apprehend them, fully aware that in this form the music seems to be divorced from its natural setting; using our imagination we try to complete the broadcast, mentally reconstructing the theatrical backdrop on which the music resounds in the theatre.]

But, our critic notes, this production was more troublesome: *Attila* was actually performed as an oratorio, and thus as if only for radio from the outset (the opera house locale being a means to an end).<sup>111</sup> For radio listeners, who now made up the majority of the audience, this did not matter: 'The fact then that *Attila* was presented in the form of an oratorio, does not affect radio listeners, since practically all the works

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<sup>108</sup> 'L'avvento della radio, la quale, diffondendo le opere liriche in ogni casa, in ogni ceto e in ogni paese, avrebbe dovuto rinfrescare e stimolare l'interesse verso questo spettacolo riconducendo la gente a teatro: il che non è avvenuto'; Graziosi, 'Il melodramma è morto?', 158.

<sup>109</sup> 'Presentare Verdi in forma di oratorio, è come ammirare in bianco ed in nero un quadro del Tiepolo'; Rinaldi, 'Al Festival di Venezia: *Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi'.

<sup>110</sup> Matteo Glinski, 'Opera od oratorio?', *L'osservatore romano* (21 September 1951).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. This foreshadows T.W. Adorno's critique nearly two decades later, that opera's obsolescence was in part a result of the jarring of older staging with the present—while attempts to modernise staging practice had been for the most part problematic; 'radio operas' in 'oratorio fashion' were making staging redundant: 'What's the point? Why even bother doing it on stage'; see Adorno, 'Opera and the Long-Playing Record' (1969), trans. Thomas Y. Levin, and reprinted in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 283-87, here 284.

broadcast on radio—before the advent of television—are in the form of an oratorio'.<sup>112</sup> Thus despite radio being in some ways capable of reviving operatic culture, it was at the same time seen as potentially damaging opera's very own aesthetic properties, only further weakening it in the face of more enticing media such as the cinema.

Indeed increasingly hegemonic media such as film (not to mention the immanent arrival of television) were perceived as occupying the traditional spaces of opera.<sup>113</sup> Film had become the popular art form of the masses, capable of representing and speaking to the public in the way that Verdi's critics desperately hoped *Attila* still could. A debate on cinema that took in the Communist press in 1951 reads like earlier, nineteenth-century writing on opera:<sup>114</sup>

Il cinema italiano in particolare ha dimostrato d'essere veramente all'avanguardia nel risveglio culturale seguito al fascismo: arte popolare è particolarmente sensibile ai problemi del popolo, il nostro cinema del dopoguerra ha saputo, con immediatezza e con eccezionale vigore, assorbire e portare su un piano d'arte le esperienze rivoluzionarie e progressive del nostro popolo durante la Resistenza e la Liberazione.<sup>115</sup>

[Italian cinema in particular has proved to be truly avant-garde in the cultural awakening following Fascism: popular art is particularly sensitive to the problems of the people; our cinema of the postwar period has been able, immediately and with great force, to absorb and carry out a plan for art of the revolutionary and progressive experiences of our people during the Resistance and Liberation.]

Films were now the vehicles of popular sentiment and national feeling, not Verdi's music.<sup>116</sup> As one writer on opera crisis and new media that year claimed, 'The

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<sup>112</sup> 'Il fatto poi che l'*Attila* sia stato presentato in forma d'oratorio, non tocca per nulla i radioascoltatori: per i quali, praticamente, tutte le opere trasmesse per radio—fino a che non ci sarà la televisione—sono in forma d'oratorio'; Gino Cornali, 'La settimana alla radio', *Corriere d'informazione* (19 September 1951).

<sup>113</sup> The imminent arrival of television was the principal topic of discussion at the XVIII Mostra nazionale radio e televisione held that year; see 'Il Ministro Spataro alla XVIII Mostra nazionale radio e televisione', *Radiocorriere* (30 September—6 October 1951), 5-6; and Gino Cornali, 'La settimana alla radio'.

<sup>114</sup> There is also the argument to be made that in the immediate postwar years, Verdi was being given a new lease of life not through revivals but through the use of his music in film, often as symbolic of the Risorgimento; see Laura Basini, 'Remembering Verdi in Post-War Italian Film', in Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica, eds., *Verdi 2001*, vol. 2 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2003), 671-79.

<sup>115</sup> P.G., 'Ladri di biciclette e il dibattito sul cinema', *L'Unità* (11 February 1951).

<sup>116</sup> In the leftwing press, much was made of films such as *La terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) and *Ladri di biciclette* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) achieving this popular status. Statistics show, however,

cinematographic, on closer inspection, revealed itself the more formidable competitor of the operatic theatre, not only for the well-known extrinsic prerogatives (i.e. to be a spectacle within reach of all minds and all budgets), but also for intrinsic reasons'.<sup>117</sup> In other words, cinema's efficacy was not just a matter of greater economic and physical accessibility, but also the powerful results of its techno-visual capabilities.

Thus a contradiction was exposed at the heart of the reception: although many had focussed on the purely musical drama of *Attila*, inadvertently reinforcing the appropriateness of the concert format (that was all they had, after all), their anxiety over radio and new media meant that they then sought to locate musical reasons for why such a means of dissemination was ultimately detrimental to the opera's aesthetic properties. Massimo Mila, for example, argued that *Attila's* music remained too intricately tied to the physical drama for them to be divorced in this way:

L'opera è—come tutti sanno—un genere composto cui le diverse componenti si integrano in varia misura: alle volte la musica può entrarci e contare per il 99 per cento e il resto essere colmato da altri elementi di cui il compositore ha saggiamente dosato e predisposto l'impiego. Nel primo caso l'opera può, senza troppo danno, essere presentata ed ascoltata in forma d'oratorio, senza il corredo della scena e dell'azione. Ma l'*Attila* appartiene piuttosto a quell'altra categoria in cui alla musica è necessaria una cospicua integrazione di altri elementi scenici e visivi.<sup>118</sup>

[Opera is—as everyone knows—a genre which consists of different components that are integrated to varying degrees: at times the music can enter and count for 99 per cent and the rest will be filled by other elements, which the composer has wisely determined and prepared to use. In the first case, opera can be presented and listened to in the form of an oratorio—minus the support of scenery or visual action—without there being too much damage. But *Attila* belongs instead to that other category in which the music is

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that these were far less popular than American and Americanised films; this is discussed as a 'crisis of neorealism' in Peter Bondanella, 'Italian Cinema', in Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [2001]), 215-42, here 219-26. The desire to enforce neorealist film as a popular genre could be seen as a way for the Communists to retain a foothold in cultural debate. If their position as cultural critics was under threat, as well as the *cultura* that had become their domain after political sidelining in the wake of the 1948 elections, then there was a need to find new spheres of activity to promote their ideology.

<sup>117</sup> 'Il cinematografo, a ben guardare, s'è rivelato il concorrente più formidabile del teatro melodrammatico, non solo per le ben note prerogative estrinseche (essere cioè uno spettacolo a portata di tutte le teste e di tutte le tasche) ma altresì per ragioni intrinseche'; Graziosi, 'Il melodramma è morto?', 158. Graziosi also looked forward with trepidation to the potential impact of television—'Chi vivrà vedrà' (Time will tell), he wrote.

<sup>118</sup> Mila, 'Al Festival musicale di Venezia: *Attila* di Giuseppe Verdi', *L'Unità* (13 September 1951).

necessary for a conspicuous integration of the other scenic and visual elements.]

Another concurred: 'Of all the works of Verdi, *Attila* is one of the most saturated of stage action ... Every page, every phrase of music is organically linked to the dramatic situation, and it is an intimate and indissoluble union'.<sup>119</sup> With this critical *volte-face* the opera's music was now deemed inseparable from the visual action.

If noise had been efficacious in the *concertati*, it could also be redeployed as a critique. Some interpreted the noisy surface as covering a deeper deficiency: 'There is no shortage of pages absolutely devoid of inspiration, and yet very noisy ... as if to say: cover up the lack of inspiration with noise'.<sup>120</sup> But for critics keen to rehabilitate the opera, again notions of a lingering ineffability could be used to salvage musical value from the noisy conventionality:

Il linguaggio musicale dell'*Attila* è un linguaggio già allora vieto, melodrammatico, convenzionale; la marzialità esterna, i cori quasi sempre sciatti, incolori ed enfatici ... Eppure la musica ha quasi sempre una densità, un vigore, una saldezza, quasi sempre uno slancio che ci afferra e ci trasporta, nostro malgrado e nonostante le nostre riserve.<sup>121</sup>

[The musical language of *Attila* is a language that was already antiquated, melodramatic, conventional: the external martial nature, the choruses almost always sloppy, colourless, emphatic ... And yet the music almost always has a density, a vigour, a solidity, almost always a momentum that grabs us and transports us, against our will and despite our reservations.]

The aesthetic properties used to praise the *concertati* as vehicles of sentiment were consequently re-deployed as a critique of oratorio performance for the radio. Thus the dual experience of the opera in oratorio format and its dissemination on the radio fuelled an intense and divided preoccupation with *Attila's* musical processes, a preoccupation premised above all on sound, noise and emotion.

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<sup>119</sup> 'Di tutte le opere di Verdi l'*Attila* è una delle più sature di azione scenica ... Ogni pagina, ogni frase della musica è organicamente legata alla situazione scenica, ed è un connubio intimo ed indissolubile'; Glinski, 'Opera od oratorio?'

<sup>120</sup> 'Non mancano le pagine assolutamente prive d'ispirazione, e tuttavia rumorosissime ... come dire: copri col rumore la mancanza d'ispirazione'; Aldo Camerino, 'Il Festival musicale veneziano: per *Attila* ci voleva Verdi', *Il giornale di Sicilia* (19 September 1951).

<sup>121</sup> Bemporad, 'Il XIV Festival di musica a Venezia: Verdi è sempre Verdi, anche in *Attila* opera minore'.

## Conclusion

This ‘techno-historical’ revival simultaneously embodied and blurred the dichotomies of the age: of tradition and invention, Risorgimento history and myth, politically fraught notions of progress and reaction.<sup>122</sup> The postwar vision the revival and commemorative literature espoused was shown to be ambiguous, hesitant and mired in a particular rhetoric of postwar crisis that simultaneously elevated Verdi as a discursive icon—an icon both locally and nationally construed. His physical remains became an allegory of the national body politic, his operas (particularly their choruses) an allegory of the Risorgimento and its politically revived crowds. Such modes of history and discourse raise further issues: the role of emotions—of affective reactions to the construction of national icons; of a national past constantly reinforced as local; and of the politicisation of commemoration, posterity and historiography.

The visit to the composer’s tomb at the beginning of the year was thus to encompass resonantly all the consequent anniversary events, shrouding them in a sepulchral aura. *Attila* was made into an incorruptible, just as Verdi’s physical corpse had been: both thus rendered so that they could become metonymic symbols of an earlier time. In the politics of Verdi commemoration, operas such as *Attila* became mechanisms of broader postwar historical stocktaking and a locus of historical emotion. Presence and ineffability were the categories of interpretation; noise and voice the auditory material. Above all, however, what mattered most across the various aspects of the revival we have discussed here —*Attila* as exhumed classic, a conduit of Risorgimento history and as media event—was Verdi’s ongoing popularity in the postwar milieu. This was a popularity explicitly threatened by the very media that made the scale of commemorative labour that year possible.

The Verdi commemoration thus in turn became a commemoration of the state of opera. But that is not to replicate some of the more lugubrious rhetoric employed in contemporary discourse—for one thing, as I hope I have made clear in the course of this chapter, operatic crisis in the postwar period was in fact startlingly productive for Verdi’s music: not just in the discussion generated, but in the philological and scholarly work undertaken, and in the number of works staged. Amid

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<sup>122</sup> The idea of a ‘techno-historical’ event is from Vivian Sobchack, ‘Afterword: Media Archaeology and Re-presenting the Past’, Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 323-33.

an entrenched rhetoric of opera crisis a 'ritorno a Verdi' was perceived to be taking place. In a period in which Italy seemed to be losing faith in much of its past, Verdi emerged as a more positive pole for rewriting it; a miraculously preserved emblem capable of endless exhumation.

## Chapter Four

### Staging Crisis: *Opera aperta* and the Venice Biennale Commissions, 1959

#### Diversity, complexity, openness

I believe that the first prejudice to break down is this: that contemporary music is unified. On the contrary the social crisis of our time is a crisis precisely in the sense that it breaks harmony, dissociates forces, opens incredibly complex contrasts, irreducible, in any case, to the simplistic clash between old and new. It is true that it poses conditions common to all, but the special nature of these conditions is precisely that of provoking diverse reactions. Faced with the disorder brought about by tyranny, with which we live today, the solutions are countless: from cynical acceptance to a kind of anguish, from superficial parody to criticism, from desperation to evasion, from subversive protest to revolutionary action. Even in the field of art, in its own ways, even in that of music; which, then, has its own specific possibilities, not at all identical to those of poetry or painting. And all these ways are 'contemporary' because they all express something of man today, and therefore of man himself; no one can be excised from the outset as anachronistic.<sup>1</sup>

Deep into the second part of Alberto Bruni Tedeschi's two-hour music theatre epic, *Diagramma circolare*, the music gives way to a series of noisy sound effects. In a moment entitled 'War', the previously brash, disjointed meanderings of the orchestral accompaniment dissolve into whistling flutes and the 'real life' sounds of screaming bombs and explosions. At the ever-shifting battle lines between reality and artifice that had provided the nexus of the work so far, the former seems suddenly to have triumphed. Yet there is even more packed into this moment than first greets the ear. The building to the climax of these sound effects is provided by scalic figures in the strings, wind and brass. The section begins with the marking 'Musica e automatismi' and presents various manifestations of mechanical sound—of the machines that inhabit the work's factory locale. Shouting and speaking carry the dramatic action.

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<sup>1</sup> 'io credo che il primo pregiudizio da abbattere sia questo: che la musica contemporanea sia una. La crisi sociale del nostro tempo è crisi, invece, appunto nel senso che rompe la concordia, dissocia le forze, apre contrasti terribilmente complessi, comunque irriducibili al semplicistico scontro fra vecchio e nuovo. È vero che pone condizioni comuni a tutti; ma il carattere precipuo di queste condizioni è appunto quello di provocarci a reazioni diversissime. Di fronte al disordine costituito in tirannia, quale lo viviamo oggi, le soluzioni sono innumerevoli: dall'accettazione cinica a quella angosciata, dalla parodia superficiale alla critica, dalla disperazione all'evasione, dalla protesta eversiva all'azione rivoluzionaria. Anche nel campo dell'arte, nei suoi modi propri, anche in quello della musica; la quale poi ha le sue possibilità specifiche, nient'affatto identiche a quelle della poesia o della pittura. E tutti questi modi sono "contemporanei", perché tutti esprimono qualcosa dell'uomo d'oggi, e perciò dell'uomo; nessuno può essere espunto a priori come anacronistico;' Fedele D'Amico, 'La musica contemporanea non è una,' *Il verri* 4/2 (April 1960), 507-13. The article formed part of a debate on the subject 'per una fenomenologia della musica contemporanea' across the pages of *Il verri* from February 1959 until April 1960.

Not until the section's close is song heard, and it comes in the form of a choral lamentation. At times there is only bodily gesture and mime. This moment, in its mix of the musical and the noisy, the didactic and the ambiguous, the functional and the aesthetic, is representative of the work as a whole. *Diagramma circolare* tries to be everything and nothing at the same time, as though it does not know what it wants to be.

The work's first critics, attending its premiere during the 1959 Venice Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea, were perplexed. Many thought this scene particularly problematic. What did the insertion of real-life sounds mean? How to make sense of the work's eclecticism? Some complained that it reminded them of a recent past best forgotten; others that it was an important testimony which should be remembered. Some claimed that Bruni Tedeschi's *impegno* (commitment) outweighed his work's obvious aesthetic flaws; others criticised the music's reliance on its timely message. Some celebrated its political and musical impartiality; others derided it for not taking a stronger position. Notable above all is the sheer diversity of response—there seemed to be an advocate and a critic for every facet of the work—and just how much was at stake in its categorisation: was it modern, contemporary, new, modernist realist, old-fashioned; was it even an *opera aperta* (open work) of the so-called *neoavanguardia*?<sup>2</sup>

Each of these areas of contemporary music-making were represented in the Venice programme: alongside a celebration of Berg and the usual revivals of early Italian (and specifically Venetian) works, there were the premieres of six serialist compositions and a first festival concert of electroacoustic experiments. The newly-appointed festival director, Mario Labroca, was keen to make his mark with a programme 'fra i più eterogenei del dopoguerra' (among the most heterogeneous of the postwar period).<sup>3</sup> Others noted that the festival had become a showcase for the bewilderingly diverse strands of current music-making. Furthermore, diversity had a more profound resonance: both symptomatic of and caused by contemporary perceptions of cultural crisis. There were strenuous critical moves to establish cultural diversity as something propagating a sense of crisis and lack of direction; but there was

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<sup>2</sup> 'neoavanguardia' is the term used to designate the literary avant-garde arising in the early 1960s, with the Gruppo 63 (a group of prominent literary figures) often seen as its originary moment.

<sup>3</sup> Piero Zanotto, 'Il carattere antitradizionale della rassegna veneziana: "ultimissime notizie" estetiche al recente festival della musica', *Il corriere di Trieste* (29 September 1959). For more on Mario Labroca's role in Fascist culture, see Chapter One.



also a sense—as the epigraph at the head of this chapter suggests—that perceptions of crisis could be productive, offering a myriad of possible paths into the future.

At the centre of the 1959 festival were three newly-commissioned music theatre pieces: *Diagramma circolare*, Gino Negri's *Il circo Max* and Luciano Berio's *Allez-hop!* Labelled 'polemical theatre' by numerous critics, these works were intended to provide a possible way out of longstanding declarations of opera crisis, as well as suggesting possible examples of *opere aperte*.<sup>4</sup> The latter term had emerged in contemporary journals—work led by essayist and literary critic Umberto Eco—that promoted a degree of indeterminacy or aleatoricism, both in form and interpretation.<sup>5</sup> The works at the festival, in many senses very different from each other, were united by two features: an embrace of contemporary socio-political concerns and a rejection of particular operatic conventions—music and text relationships, operatic vocal declamation and stylistic homogeneity.<sup>6</sup> Perceptions of the decline of opera were intimately intertwined with a twofold preoccupation: with anti-operatic discourse, and with revivalist work on opera and music theatre.

In what follows, I shall first examine the notions of openness, diversity and crisis staged by these three theatrical works before considering how such notions were both prompted by and became themes within the discourse that surrounded their performance. I want to suggest that both the works and the emerging trend of which they formed a part—many used critic Guido M. Gatti's term 'nouvelle vague' to describe it—not only in many ways preceded the related literary phenomenon (at the time called a *neoavanguardia*, later a *postmodernismo*) that came to dominate the

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<sup>4</sup> Accounts held in the collection at the Venice Biennale's Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC) show that most of the festival's budget that year was spent on the commissions.

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco had also spoken about the idea of an 'open work' at the XII Congresso internazionale di filosofia in 1958. 'Opera' here applied of course in the Italian sense of a more abstract concept of 'work', but in a musical context it came to be applied principally, it would seem, to theatrical music that defined itself as anti-opera (in the 'opera lirica'/'melodramma' sense).

<sup>6</sup> As one critic put it: 'il Festival si è prefisso di ripercorrere le sempre più difficili, accidentate, insidiose vie del teatro in musica, proponendo al pubblico che segue queste ultime, intense serate, tre esperienze, tre soluzioni, diverse, unite da un denominatore comune: la rottura completa, definitiva, assoluta, con gli schemi tradizionali, ciò vuol dire, soprattutto, con la essenza musicale, del melodramma' (the festival has set out to chronicle the increasingly difficult, eventful and treacherous paths of music theatre, offering the public who attend these latest, intense evenings: three experiences, three solutions, diverse but united by a common denominator—complete rupture, final and absolute, with the traditional schemes, which means, above all, with the musical essence of opera); Giuseppe Pugliese, 'XXII Festival di musica contemporanea: due opere in un atto in "prima" mondiale', *Il gazzettino* (24 September 1959).

1960s, but also arose from a particular culture of postwar crisis.<sup>7</sup> In arguing that these pieces were seen as a migration away from high modernism, I do not suggest that they were necessarily anti-modernist, or indeed postmodern *per se*. Rather, I want to examine how they were articulated as distinct from a resurgent high modernism (something always more rhetorically unified than in practice), in the wake of World War Two; to show instead that there are other stories to be told of this period, of early moves to something more open and fragmented, which were seen as emerging in tandem with this resurgence.

Central to my argument is also a resituating of Eco's classic text *Opera aperta* (1962), tracing the musical context in which many of its ideas were first formed. The book is often seen as the foundational work of the literary *neoavanguardia*, spawning a decade of activity based around notions of openness and experimentation.<sup>8</sup> Even David Robey's introduction to the English translation proposes that the text is a 'manifesto' for what was to happen throughout the rest of the decade.<sup>9</sup> However, Robey makes little attempt to explicate the origins of the book's ideas, beyond saying that they were formed in part from Eco's relationship with 'the avant-garde'. It is on these origins that I want to focus here. To approach Eco's landmark text from this angle presents a different picture from that normally told: one in which there is a remarkable convergence of literary and musical ideals; and, furthermore, a story that can be articulated around the now-obscure premiere of three pieces of music theatre.

### 'Tre opere in un atto'

The sad memories of the war and of its extremely sad consequences, in the social, political and economic terrain, seem again to have taken hold in the creative minds of poets, musicians, filmmakers, cultivators, in other words, of all the arts. But the public, that mass of the public, eager for culture and recreation, who attend opera houses and prose theatres, cinemas and concerts, who willingly linger in front of a television, hoping to put to rest their tired spirit, would like finally to do without those sad tragic memories, since to pass

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<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to suggest that there were no literary examples prior to 1960: Edoardo Sanguineti and Italo Calvino—to name two of the key figures later associated with the movement—had been publishing material in this vein for several years. Rather, 1959 seems to represent a sudden intensification in debate and flourishing of examples.

<sup>8</sup> One of the only texts to provide a more sustained analysis of the relationship between the *neoavanguardia* and music is Paolo Somigli, 'Gruppo 63 and Music: A Complex Relationship', in *Neoavanguardia: Italian Experimental Literature and Arts in the 1960s*, eds. Paolo Chirumbolo, Mario Moroni and Luca Somigli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 254–82. Yet even here the author claims that the musical open work began only in 1962, mentioning Luciano Berio's *Passaggio* (on a text by Sanguineti) as a founding example.

<sup>9</sup> David Robey, 'Introduction' to Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989 [1962]).

them on are now sufficient the many pages of books and the painful experiences that each of us—some more than others—carries in his heart.<sup>10</sup>

The first of the three works was Berio's *Allez-hop!*, premiered on 21 September at the end of a concert of instrumental music by the European avant-garde (Boulez, Ligeti, Maderna), held at the Teatro La Fenice.<sup>11</sup> Subtitled a 'racconto mimico' and unfolding in six scenes, it was originally called simply *Opera aperta* and is based on a plot by Italo Calvino. Scored for mezzo-soprano, eight actors, ballet troupe and orchestra (including saxophones, electric guitar and an enlarged percussion section), there are also two songs that can be included (Cathy Berberian sang them at the premiere). The orchestra of La Fenice, conducted by Nino Sanzogno, performed the music. The mimic action was executed by a roll call of illustrious artists, with stage direction, scenery and costumes by the French physical theatre specialist Jacques Lecoq.<sup>12</sup>

The first scene opens in a night-club (Scene 1, Nocturne), where a bored audience watches a striptease and then a flea circus. A song describes a parallel scene of domestic inertia ('From the windows I look at the city/... and rest at home, do not know why/ chewing gum/ ... I have everything in life/ Have a little look at what's on TV').<sup>13</sup> A flea escapes: jumping between audience members and pursued by a flea trainer, it causes disruption (Scene 2, Rhumba-ramble). The flea leaves the room on a gentleman (Scene 3, Scat-rag), whose agitation provokes general commotion. After the gentleman is taken to a police station, the flea causes further disruption as it passes from policemen and politicians to generals and soldiers (Scene 4, The Great War). The disruption leads to war, but women—also provoked by the flea—instigate a revolution (Scene 5, Refrain). The trainer finally recaptures the flea, which is now

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<sup>10</sup> 'I tristi ricordi della guerra e quelli delle sue tristissime conseguenze, sul terreno sociale, politico, economico, sembrano far presa ancora sui cervelli creatori di poeti, di musicisti, di cineasti, di cultori, insomma, d'ogni arte. Ma il pubblico, quella massa di pubblico, desiderosa di cultura e di passatempo, che frequenta teatri lirici e teatri di prosa, sale cinematografiche e di concerto, che s'attarda volentieri davanti a un televisore, con la speranza di riposare l'affaticato spirito, di quei tristi tragici ricordi vorrebbe finalmente far senza, dato che a tramandarli sono sufficienti ormai le tante pagine dei libri e le dolorose esperienze che—chi più chi meno—ognuno di noi porta in cuore'; Gino Cucchetti, 'La rassegna di musiche contemporanee: tre atti unici al Festival di Venezia', *L'avvenire d'Italia* (24 September 1959).

<sup>11</sup> The other two works were staged on 23 September, and the three again together on 25<sup>th</sup> of the month, all at La Fenice.

<sup>12</sup> Performers included Isaac Alvarez, Philippe Avron, Eddie Berberian, Yvonne Cartier, Hélène Chatelain and Eduardo Manet.

<sup>13</sup> 'Dalla finestra guardo la città/... e resto in casa non si sa perché/ masticando chewing-gum/ ... Ho tutto dalla vita/ vedi un po' cosa c'è alla TV.'

pregnant. Everything quickly returns to normal: the public is again reduced to boredom and passivity (Scene 6, Finale). Disillusioned by what he sees, the trainer releases the flea.

The story is obviously allegorical, seemingly staging a checkmate between the meaningless complacency of mass culture and the equally meaningless effort to escape from it through disruption and violence.<sup>14</sup> Much interpretation was supposed to be left to the spectator. The musical accompaniment was to serve a similarly ambiguous function. On one level it fluctuated wildly between dodecaphony and popular song, dance rhythms and jazz. On another level, the more knowing could discern a wealth of self-borrowing from Berio's compositions earlier in the decade: material first heard in his *Mimusique no. 2* (1955) is recycled, and the 'Scat rag' is taken from his *Divertimento* (1957). Furthermore, closure and circularity is evident in the structure and process of the main musical sections: the 'Musica di scena', which opens with a saxophone trio texture; the 'Rhumba ramble', dominated by maracas and bongos; and the 'Scat rag' with its wind- and percussion-heavy orchestration. Each section oscillates between movement and stillness, clusters of chords and rhythmic superimpositions dissipating into quiet moments of relative inertia. The sound world is a collage of old and new, high and low. It is both a parody of and a challenge to operatic convention: bodily gesture reigns at the expense of voice; musical genre is ruptured through collage and eclecticism.<sup>15</sup>

Bruni Tedeschi's *Diagramma circolare*—while strikingly different in some respects—deals with similar themes. Scored for actors, several male trios, a 64-strong

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<sup>14</sup> Early sketches for the work show that it was originally to be based on the sinking of the Titanic, a topic that could be used to attack metanarratives of technology and progress, and demonstrate how these could be destabilised by indeterminacy: the iceberg was 'come elemento di una causalità e di una naturalità con la quale evidentemente la scienza non si era ancora integrata' (like an element of a causality and a naturalness that science had evidently not yet integrated with). See the anonymous document (I would guess from the way it is written by Berio), 'Opera aperta: azione musicale di Luciano Berio, su testi di Furio Colombo e Umberto Eco' (Milan, 4 April 1959), held in the ASAC. The story of the Titanic was later incorporated into *Opera* (1970).

<sup>15</sup> Berio's stylistic eclecticism is often seen in Anglo-American scholarship as emerging in the 1960s, especially with the third movement of *Sinfonia* (1968), which manipulates the third movement scherzo of Mahler's Second Symphony within a web of quotations from Bach, Beethoven, Boulez and so on. See, for example, Daniel Albright, ed., *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 13. Textbooks on postmodernism often start with the *Sinfonia*: see Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55; and Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 74. Richard Taruskin claims that the movement *foreshadows* what was later called a 'postmodernist' commentary, its 'impossibility of innovation except through unexpected juxtaposition and collage' representative of the Sixties; in Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 347.

choir, full orchestra and a narrator, it is based on a libretto by Giampiero Bona and the composer himself, mining the latter's experience as a Turin industrialist.<sup>16</sup> It too was performed by the orchestra and chorus of La Fenice under Nino Sanzogno, but with stage direction by Virginio Puecher and scenery by Luciano Damiani. Divided into two parts, the work has a six-stage narrative: the 'circular diagram' of the title refers to a large board at centre stage, a prop that features a dial which moves with the course of the action—through production, overproduction, crisis, dictatorship and armament, war, and ruins. One critic even called the work 'un trattato di economia politica' (a treatise on political economy).<sup>17</sup> The scenography drew reference to the sketches by the political avant-gardist Vlastislav Hofman for a play by G.K. Chesterton, staged at Prague's National Theatre in 1927. A desire to communicate the political message determined the staging of both: they were framed by wooden structures and walkways, with a board top centre containing text.<sup>18</sup>

The work opens in the ruins of the First World War and ends in those of the Second. It too seemed to stress the futility of recent events. The only thing that can break the cycle is the ambiguous notion of 'foreseeing higher reason', something never forthcoming. The narrator provides a commentary, remaining detached from the events he describes. The action centres on the lives of the president of a factory and of a worker and his family. As production picks up after the First World War, the factory employs the worker. However, with production leading to overproduction and crisis, he is laid off. Unable to find further employment in the Great Depression, he commits suicide. As a dictatorship takes hold, exploiting the contemporary crisis, the worker's son is killed by the police for plotting against the state. Totalitarianism leads to war, and the worker's wife is killed in a bombardment. Among the ruins, only the daughter is left to mourn. There is no space for a moral epilogue; the speaker warns against drawing lessons from such events, or apportioning blame to those who acted in the only way open to them. The point, rather, is the inevitability of such occurrences;

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<sup>16</sup> The letters in the Alberto Bruni Tedeschi archive, held at the Fondazione Cini in Venice, show that the libretto was a hugely protracted affair, with many new versions and revisions passed between the two.

<sup>17</sup> Enzo Borelli, 'Tre opere in un atto al Festival di Venezia', *La nazione* (24 September 1959).

<sup>18</sup> Alongside photos of *Diagramma circolare* held in the ASAC are copies of sketches by Hofman. Such reincorporation by the post-Second World War avant-garde of the theory and practice of the aftermath of the First is discussed and critiqued in Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009 [1974]), and 'Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of Theory of the Avant-Garde', trans. Bettina Brandt and Daniel Purdy, *New Literary History* 41/1 (2010), 695-715.

the speaker ends: 'All that has been in the past and is in the present, will be again in the future'.

The main characters speak rather than sing. Indeed, song is reserved for the chorus (who mainly participate through six choral lamentations), and an unusual assortment of trios—three stockbrokers, three professors of statistics and so on. The accompanying music works both with and against the text: at times the sheer noisiness of an orchestra that again includes saxophones and enlarged wind and percussion sections overwhelms the spoken word; at others, the music works purely to support the text.<sup>19</sup> As Carlo Parmentola wrote in an extended programme note for the 1975 revival at the Teatro Regio in Turin:

Come il dramma vive del violento contrasto tra realtà e razionalità, così la musica a volte sfiora i confini del rumore, della riproduzione realistica del fatti sonori di cui si tratta, a volte è una razionale architettura contrappuntistica obbediente a leggi rigorose, a volte è la voce del dolore umano (le sei 'lamentazioni' corali), più spesso è un rapido avvicinarsi e un inestricabile intrecciarsi di tutte queste cose.<sup>20</sup>

[As the drama brings about the violent contrast between reality and rationality, so the music at times touches the boundaries of noise, of realistic reproduction of the sound events in question; at times it is a rational contrapuntal architecture obedient to strict laws; at other times it is the voice of human suffering (the six choral 'lamentations'); more often it is a rapid exchange and an inextricable interweaving of all these things.]

'Counterpoint' was also a word employed in the original publicity literature: not in the traditional sense of music with many voices, but rather to refer to the variety of means employed, from film, slogans and sound effects, to light and action. As with the

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<sup>19</sup> The overwhelming nature of the performance was enhanced by the use of film clips and slogans on stage, and sound effects (the explosion of bombs, the pounding of machines, the crashing of the Stock Exchange); as one critic noted, for example, 'con l'uso di rumori elettronici, il sibilo e la deflagrazione delle bombe, orrendi strepiti, la cosa in sé, brutalmente' (with the use of electronic noises, the hiss and the explosion of the bombs, hideous shouts, the thing in itself, brutal); Andrea Della Corte, 'Musica contemporanea a Venezia', *La stampa* (24 September 1959).

<sup>20</sup> Carlo Parmentola, programme note to *Diagramma circolare* at the Teatro Regio in Turin (1975). The reception of the 1975 performance mentions the work as a precursor to the noisy works aspiring to 'teatro totale' or 'contro opera' in the early 1960s in Italy, such as Luigi Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* (1961), Giacomo Manzoni's *Atomtod* (1965), and Berio's *Passaggio* (1961-62) and *Laborintus II* (1965). See, for example, Guido Piamonte, 'Diagramma circolare sedici anni dopo al Regio di Torino: tanti attori, musica in sottofondo', *Il giornale* (22 June 1975) and 'Diagramma circolare di Bruni Tedeschi: economia e opera lirica stasera in scena al Regio', *La stampa* (20 June 1975); Massimo Mila, 'Lo spettacolo al Regio: opera "politica" tra musica e parola', *La stampa* (22 June 1975); and S.C., 'Mondo operaio e industriali sul palcoscenico del Regio', *La stampa* (18 July 1975).

fluctuations between movement and stillness in *Allez-hop!*, here dynamic contrasts between sheer noise and near-silence create a cyclical sound world.<sup>21</sup> Composed on the brink of the economic miracle, *Diagramma circolare* replicates the noises of factory production while also recalling the sounds of war.<sup>22</sup> The work managed to reinforce a series of dichotomies that it simultaneously sought to obfuscate: between realism and representation, speech and song, noise and silence, functionality and experimentation.

The third work, Negri's *Il circo Max*, addressed a very different aspect of contemporary life but shared many preoccupations with the other two pieces.<sup>23</sup> Subtitled *una profanazione in un atto*, scored for soprano, tenor, baritone, actor, ten mimes and orchestra, the work employs devices of popular song, pantomime, cabaret and variety theatre to mock current celebrity culture; as one critic claimed, in *Il circo Max* Negri's 'ironic vein is fully revealed in a merciless satire on the edge of revue theatre'.<sup>24</sup> The production was directed by Franco Enriquez, with scenery and costumes by the artist Franco Rognoni; the music was performed by the orchestra of La Fenice under Sanzogno. Styled as a satirical review, it portrays personalities normally found in the pages of glossy weeklies. The eponymous 'Max' refers to the American journalist Elsa Maxwell, played at the premiere by the famous film actress Paola Borboni. Max is a circus trainer of a motley assortment of animals, each portraying a particular celebrity. There is the 'sensitive little dog' Tony—a reference to the actor Anthony Perkins; Barbara the 'praying mantis' man-eater—an allusion to the American billionaire Barbara Hutton; the 'black panther' Minerva is a portrait of Maria Callas; Zizi and Bibi are two Siamese kittens referring to Zsa Zsa Gabor and

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<sup>21</sup> Several noted that noise was achieved partly through sheer loudness, created by means of electronic amplification; see, for example, Luigi Colacicchi, 'I fenomeni sociali ispirano un'opera', *Settimana Torino* (10 October 1959). It is interesting, however, that here noise is often perceived as a negative corollary of a 'bad realism', whereas with Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* it became one of the work's most important attributes; see Luciano Alberti, 'Musiche alle Biennale: le giovani forze alla ricerca di nuove formule per il teatro', *Il mattino* (24 September 1959). For more on noise and realism in *Intolleranza 1960*, see Chapter Five.

<sup>22</sup> The boom in modes of production during the late 1950s and early 1960s was concomitant with a renewed interest in the pathology of factory noise. With new, noisier machines and greater levels of production there was an awareness of their potential to cause hearing loss; for more on this, see Stefano Pivato, *Il secolo del rumore: il paesaggio sonoro nel novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 151–52, and Francesco Carnevale and Alberto Baldasseroni, *Mal da lavoro. Storia della salute dei lavoratori* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> There remains a dearth of scholarship on the composer. The most important publication to date is a recent monograph, Marco Moiraghi, *Voglio un monumento in Piazza della Scala: la Milano musicale di Gino Negri* (Rome: Squilibri, 2011), which also includes two CDs of his music.

<sup>24</sup> 'la sua vena ironica si palesa compiutamente in una satira spietata ai limiti del teatro di rivista'; Luigi Rossi, 'Week end tutto musicale', *La settimana radio TV* (2 January 1960).

Brigitte Bardot; Birgit the ‘white rabbit’ is Ingrid Bergman; Krissy the seal is Elisabeth Taylor; and Casarosa the ‘apoplectic Mandrill’ is Porfirio Rubirosa. The text in *Il circo Max* is sung against a musical surface based on pastiche, collage and musical borrowing; ‘profanation’ thus works on multiple levels. Negri employed an ironic, detached style focussed on pre-existing music for the purposes of social satire. Like Berio, at times he alludes to twelve-tone procedure, at others he espouses something more eclectic—both incorporating elements of popular culture and directly quoting Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Weber. Supposedly ‘elite’ culture is here as much mocked and parodied as is celebrity culture. And although parody tends to wear its meaning rather obviously, the work seems to revel in its heterogeneous surface.

With the repeated emphases across the three pieces on stasis, repetition and circularity, it seems rather strange that they were co-opted into a debate on openness. In addition, notions of ambiguity and multiple layers of interpretation seemingly jar with works that had explicit allegorical meanings and semantically transparent parodies. Even eclecticism had an easy decipherability, pitting recognisable stylistic codes side by side. Yet beyond their labelling as *opera aperta* by the festival publicity, critics continually tried to assess the works according to these criteria. In other words, there seemed to be much aesthetic value in the newly emerging concepts, and the need to locate their applicability to the pieces.<sup>25</sup> The three theatrical works were rhetorically enforced as new, with no precedents cited despite obvious allusions to earlier works: *Allez-hop!* with Shostakovich’s *The Nose* (1927-28)—also a satirical opera underpinned by montage; Bruni Tedeschi’s trios of singing economic libertarians with Ping, Pang and Pong—‘representatives of the outmoded liberal-democratic order’—in Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926);<sup>26</sup> *Il circo Max* and the Prologue of Berg’s *Lulu* (1935), with the latter’s opening tableau of a circus ringmaster introducing the animals of his menagerie.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Many critics prefaced their reviews with disclaimers that what followed was just ‘a few observations’, rather than a ‘final judgement’, given the newness of the works and concepts at hand; see, for example, Andrea Della Corte, ‘Musica contemporanea a Venezia’, *La stampa* (24 September 1959).

<sup>26</sup> Arman Schwartz, ‘Mechanism and Tradition in Puccini’s *Turandot*’, *The Opera Quarterly* 25/1-2 (2009), 28-50, here 37.

<sup>27</sup> All three were also clearly influenced, to differing degrees, by Bertolt Brecht’s conception of epic theatre, especially regarding its emphasis on gesture, montage and commentary as a means for *Verfremdungseffekt* (defamiliarisation effect). As Eco wrote, with Brecht: ‘L’opera qui è “aperta” come



To return to the statement by D'Amico with which I began, the 'tre opere in un atto' that dominated the festival that year thus provided no unified or homogeneous vision of the musical future. Much like contemporary experimental literature—Calvino's trilogy *I nostri antenati* (1960), for example, tells of a viscount cut in half, a baron who decides to live in a tree and a knight consisting only of empty armour—fantasy and parody masked pervading ideologies. From the ironic parable of Berio to the supposed commitment of Bruni Tedeschi and the social satire of Negri, the three works offered myriad ways of dealing both with war and Fascism, and with the more disconcerting aspects of the present (namely, the ever expanding influence of mass media). Thus despite being perceived by contemporary critics as foreshadowing ideals later to define postmodernism, in terms of their content they remained doggedly modernist: casting a critical and pessimistic gaze both on the recent past and emerging postwar culture.

Further similarities between the three works emerged: above all, the borderlands of experimentation and communication, as centred on a rethinking of the relationship between music and text. It was this relationship in particular that was perceived as moving beyond a rhetorically hegemonic high modernism, to the multifaceted, levelling eclecticism that the former continually tried to disavow. Staging the idea of crisis afforded a way in to a particular kind of openness, one in which the various predicaments of individual characters could be read as representative of broader cultural or social crisis by those who had the means or inclination to interpret them as such.

## Openness, information, communication

contemporary poetics merely reflects our culture's attraction to the 'indeterminate', for all those processes which, instead of relying on a univocal, necessary sequence of events, prefer

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è "aperto" un dibattito: la soluzione è attesa e auspicata, ma deve venire dal concorso cosciente del pubblico. La apertura si fa strumento di pedagogia rivoluzionaria' (The work here is 'open' in the way that a debate is 'open': the solution is expected or anticipated and welcomed, but it must come out of the conscious cooperation of the public. Openness is the instrument of revolutionary pedagogy); Eco, 'L'opera in movimento e la coscienza dell'epoca', *Incontri musicali* 3 (August 1959), 32-54, here 40. Negri had been involved in orchestrating the music for the performance of Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera* at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan in 1956. The performance, directed by Giorgio Strehler and Bruno Maderna, was seminal in introducing Brecht to postwar Italy. Berio later claimed that after the theatrical experimentation of Pirandello, Brecht and Beckett, a return to traditional opera was impossible; Sandra Petrigiani, 'Quel fantasma dell'opera' (interview with Berio), *Panorama* (19 May 1991), 173-74.

to disclose a field of possibilities, to create ‘ambiguous’ situations open to all sorts of operative choices and interpretations.<sup>28</sup>

After the hype and expectation generated by their commission, the three pieces were—perhaps inevitably—judged something of a disappointment. Presented as the future of theatrical music and a way out of a much-bewailed opera crisis, the overriding impression of the reviews was that they were not what had been hoped for. One critic summarised: ‘the composers have not taken a single step to get out of the tangle of doubt that seems to wrap around modern music’.<sup>29</sup> These views were shared by much of the foreign press. Reginald Smith Brindle, for example, wrote in the *Observer* that:

Opera’s grandiose gestures and eloquent rhetoric are no longer compatible with a contemporary idiom or with today’s aesthetics. But what should replace them? We hoped Venice would give the answer in this year’s promise of a ‘polemical theatre’, presenting three new works ‘liberated from tradition, offering new solutions in a completely modern way’ ... As it was, the ‘new solutions’ proved completely ephemeral, and the whole venture was a near-fiasco.<sup>30</sup>

Fundamental aspects of the Italian discourse are reflected in Smith Brindle’s statement: that older operatic spectacles jarred with the postwar present—and that it was the specific conventions of these spectacles that needed to be critiqued (its ‘grandiose gestures and eloquent rhetoric’); that a new incarnation of theatrical music was still needed—older forms of opera had to be replaced, and mass media not allowed to dominate; and that the newly offered works failed to supersede those supposedly defunct spectacles of the past.

These declarations of opera crisis were nestled within a broader rhetoric of musical crisis. Cultural malaise and uncertainty had resulted in two competing rhetorical modes: didacticism and openness. Musical life that year was troubled by just such a dichotomy: on the one hand the release of Theodor W. Adorno’s *Philosophy of New Music* in Italian translation (Einaudi, 1959), on the other a well-publicised concert series by John Cage was given around Italy. Adorno was discerned to be

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<sup>28</sup> Eco, *The Open Work*, 44.

<sup>29</sup> ‘i compositori non abbiano compiuto un solo passo per uscire dal groviglio di equivoci che sembra involgere la musica moderna’; Carlo Belli, ‘Falso cammino della musica “moderna”’, *Persona* (16 March 1960), 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> Reginald Smith Brindle, ‘The Venice Festival’, *Observer* (27 September 1959).

representative of a hard-edged modernism that valued composer-centric autonomy (seen as increasingly old-fashioned);<sup>31</sup> Cage was celebrated as part of the move towards an openness of artistic conception.<sup>32</sup> While some still endorsed Adornian high modernism, others noticed his failure to recognise that things were changing; his dogmatism jarred in a context where people were starting to eschew the didactic. Yet within the intricacies of his argument, Adorno both exacerbated and harnessed these broader perceptions of crisis. As Massimo Mila wrote,

dopo avere documentato l'ineluttabile formazione storica della nuova musica, ne dichiara poi l'intima condizione di crisi. Il suo ragionamento consiste nel far vedere come oggi non ci può essere altra musica che questa ('la dodecafonia è veramente il suo destino'), e qualunque altra è simulazione e tradimento.<sup>33</sup>

[after having documented how this new music was an inevitable development within its historical context, he [Adorno] then declared that a deep state of crisis had been reached. He reasoned that today there can be no other music than this ('dodecaphony is its true destiny'), and anything else is pretence and betrayal.]

Conversely, Cage's recent activity in Italy was directly incorporated into the discussion on *opera aperta*, several writers noting Cage's involvement with the emerging concept. Both figures thus formed part of a growing divide in Italian music, between a philosophical modernism centred on notions of autonomy and unity, and a 'nouvelle vague' more interested in indeterminacy and experimentation.<sup>34</sup> What is more, the growing cogency of the latter was prompting a productive doubting of the former; as one critic noted, 'Experimentalism seems to hold a leading position in contemporary avant-garde music, which means that doubt has penetrated even into the dogmatic

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<sup>31</sup> Massimo Mila also noted that the avant-garde were distancing themselves from Adorno's ideas after being angered by the essay 'The Aging of New Music', which many interpreted as an attack on themselves; see Mila, 'Il destino dodecafonico' (3 May 1959), reprinted in *Cronache musicali 1955-1959* (Turin: Einaudi, 1959), 447-49.

<sup>32</sup> Luigi Rognoni cited Adorno's text as an introduction and guide to the electronic music concert at the festival; this is discussed further in M. Fior Sartorelli, 'I concerti alla Fenice di Venezia: freddezza dodecafonica e briose farse musicali', *Messaggero Veneto-Udine* (22 September 1959). D'Amico discusses the arrival of the text—and the comparison with Cage—in 'Adorno e la "nuova musica"' (September 1959), reprinted in *I casi della musica* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1962), 491-506.

<sup>33</sup> Mila, 'Il destino dodecafonico' (3 May 1959), reprinted in *Cronache musicali 1955-1959*, 449.

<sup>34</sup> These also conceal a certain positioning in relation to mass media: the former tend to be examples of what Eco called 'apocalyptic' intellectuals (those reactionary to the infiltration of popular culture and mass media), and the latter more 'integrated intellectuals' (who embraced multifarious strands of culture, both high and low). Eco positioned himself as somewhere in the middle; Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati: comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1964).

field of dodecaphony, but not without interesting effects'.<sup>35</sup> In addition to increasingly divided camps, then, there was simultaneously—and paradoxically—a levelling of the field: with the growing efficacy of the ideals behind the 'nouvelle vague', the increasing critiques of capitalism, Marxism and even historiography became simply narrative options among many.

The three theatre pieces themselves exposed a series of bifurcations: although perceived as playing with ideas of openness and communicative experimentation, their transparent parodies betrayed a measure of didacticism. And although they sought to incorporate and compete with mass media, they simultaneously viewed the new means with hostility. These contradictory divides were reflected in the ensuing reception. Despite emphasising the openness the works supposedly espoused, some critics refused to abstain from unifying value judgments: in the multiple readings intended, many still sought to prize one analysis over another—disavowing a more heterogeneous mode of interpretation. If perceptions of crisis were reflected in this need for decisiveness and unity, that need placed pressure on the critics' mode of discourse: in pushing the aesthetic oppositions they tried to maintain to such a point of extremity, they started to level out, losing their categorical force. What emerged was a paradoxical situation: of maintaining the importance of diversity and disorder through imposing organisation.

Some commentators instead grasped the 'openness' the pieces were supposed to present, and the attendant issue of fugitive meaning. A question repeatedly asked was: in what ways could the works be said to be 'open'? And what did the term itself mean in practice? D'Amico wrote that the programme for the festival announced the pieces as 'Open experiences of music theatre'; but

Che significa 'aperte'? Secondo una tendenza, oggi sempre più cosciente e meglio teorizzata nell'ambito dell'avanguardia postweberniana [*sic*], opera d'arte aperta è quella a cui l'autore evita di dare una forma e un significato compiuto: essa pone in essere delle direzioni potenzialmente polivalenti, a cui l'occasione del suo impiego, o l'iniziativa dell'esecutore, o anche la interpretazione di questo o quell'ascoltatore posto in queste o in queste altre

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<sup>35</sup> 'Lo sperimentalismo sembra tenere una posizione di primo piano nell'avanguardia musicale contemporanea il che significa che il dubbio è penetrato anche nel campo del dogmatismo dodecafonico non senza effetti interessanti'; Duilio Courir, 'La musica contemporanea a Venezia: un festival interessante', *Il resto del Carlino* (29 September 1959).

condizioni, daranno un senso compiuto; ma solo provvisoriamente compiuto; domani questo senso potrà mutare.<sup>36</sup>

[What does 'open' mean? According to a trend, which is today more and more conscious and better theorised as part of the post-Webern avant-garde, the open work of art is that to which the author avoids giving a complete form and meaning: it puts in place potentially polyvalent directions, to which the occasion of its employment, or the initiative of the performer, or even the interpretation of this or that listener placed in these or in these other conditions, will give a complete meaning, but one only provisionally completed—tomorrow this meaning may change.]

Openness was thus explicitly defined in opposition to didacticism: meaning was to come from the listener, a particular reading to be only one option among many. And criticism itself had to respond to these demands: any attempt to discern how the works might be open had simultaneously to be aware of the dangers of didacticism or over-interpretation. Furthermore, the proponents of these new modes of criticism were not demarcated along political lines, but instead found adherents across the political spectrum.

The crux was again one of semantics, of revelling in the ambiguous. Even the famous poet Eugenio Montale intervened, addressing the issue of covert meaning explicitly; he wrote of *Allez-hop!* that:

Certo qui la pulce è simbolo di qualche cosa: forse dell'attivismo contemporaneo, forse di uno stato generale di cattiva coscienza del cosiddetto uomo alienato. Ma è inutile indagare: un simbolo veramente comprensibile perde ogni vera forza di suggestione.<sup>37</sup>

[Of course, here the flea is a symbol of something: perhaps contemporary activism, perhaps the general state of bad conscience of the so-called alienated man. But it is useless to probe into it: a truly understandable symbol loses any real power of suggestion.]

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<sup>36</sup> D'Amico, "Opere aperte" al Festival di Venezia: i compiti delle pulci', *Il paese* (29 September 1959). Similarly, Piero Santi claimed that what united the works was that they were 'determinato dal loro enuclearsi in forme che, per un verso o per l'altro, non si offrono compiute e definitive, ma si dispongono a soluzioni possibili' (determined by their definition in forms that, for one reason or another, do not offer themselves as closed and definitive, but open up possible solutions'; Santi, 'Tre operine dal XXII Festival musicale di Venezia: *Il circo Max*, *Diagramma circolare*, *Allez Hop!*', *Radiocorriere* (4 October 1959).

<sup>37</sup> Eugenio Montale, 'Musiche da camera ed elettroniche alla Fenice: *Allez-hop* a Venezia di Berio e Calvino', *Corriere d'informazione* (22 September 1959).

The repetition of ‘perhaps’ is the rhetorical marker here, the enactment of a deeper warning. Ambiguity and the dangers of interpretation thus operated on a dual level: they became modes of the new poetics, synonymous with notions of openness and indeterminacy, and features that the new practise of criticism required. Openness could be manifest not just in formal experimentation and aleatoricism, but also in these ideals of ‘ambiguity’ and symbolism.

The new trend emerging in the reception of the three pieces was simultaneously being discussed in contemporary musical and literary journals—debates that involved many of the protagonists and critics of the Venice performances. The journal *Il verri*, founded in 1956, quickly established itself as the mouthpiece of the literary *neoavanguardia*. What is significant, however, is that many of the ideas synonymous with the literary arm of the movement crystallised in a wide-ranging debate that took place from February 1959 to April 1960, on the subject ‘per una fenomenologia della musica contemporanea’ (towards a phenomenology of modern music).<sup>38</sup> After defining the epoch again as one of crisis, the instigator Enzo Paci claimed that this *crisi* resulted in the simultaneous reinforcing and collapsing of aesthetic oppositions, thus creating the impression of diversity and eclecticism.<sup>39</sup>

The ‘phenomenology of modern music’ and the idea of openness was also a theme developed in *Incontri musicali*, a journal founded by Berio and Bruno Maderna in 1956 to accompany a concert series of the same name (the journal ran for four annual issues until 1960). The third and fourth issues (1959–60) focussed expressly on the emergent idea of the open work. Here again Paci wrote of the sense of an epoch emerging, one requiring a new phenomenology: ‘If one can speak, and for now only as a hypothesis, of a phenomenological analysis of contemporary music, it is because the situation of the latter is rooted in the situation of a humanity in crisis’.<sup>40</sup> It was in this musical debate on a new trend emergent from postwar crisis that Eco expounded on

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<sup>38</sup> The debate was opened by Enzo Paci, *Il verri* 3/1 (February 1959), and went on to include contributions by Gianandrea Gavazzeni, Luigi Pestalozza, Brunello Rondi and Santi.

<sup>39</sup> ‘la crisi di una cultura e di una civiltà si esprime spesso nella assolutizzazione dei due poli della sintesi dialettica’ (the crisis of a culture and of a civilisation is often expressed in the resolution of two poles of dialectical synthesis); Paci, ‘Per una fenomenologia della musica contemporanea’, *Il verri* 3/1 (February 1959), 3–11.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Se si può parlare, e per ora soltanto in via ipotetica, di un’analisi fenomenologica della musica contemporanea, è perché la situazione di quest’ultima è radicata nella situazione di una umanità in crisi’; Paci, ‘Fenomenologia della relazione e musica contemporanea’, *Incontri musicali* 4 (September 1960), 3–8, here 3.

his notion of ‘openness’.<sup>41</sup> He began by observing a recent shift in musical communication: on an obvious level, of endowing the performer with greater autonomy and choice, as in Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, Berio’s *Sequenza per flauto solo* and Henri Pousseur’s *Scambi*.<sup>42</sup> Such works he called ‘opera in movimento’. At a more complex level, Eco identified another type of openness—the type we see articulated in response to the Venice performances—of works of *closed* form, but *open* to interpretation.

Eco’s first article appeared as a response to a review by D’Amico of works by Berio, Luigi Nono and Giorgio Federico Ghedini. D’Amico had observed a tendency in the avant-garde to promote ‘non-linguistic structures’ of heterogeneity, rather than strive to create ‘works of art’. In his later review and critique of Eco’s response, D’Amico foreshadowed subsequent critiques of Eco’s theory, such as that of Jean-Jacques Nattiez: that there was not sufficient differentiation between openness for the interpreter and that for the listener; that the particularities of the listener and their circumstance needed further refinement; that openness took place only on a poetic level, since there was no obvious way for the listener to know if the work was supposed to be perceived as open or not; and that there was no such thing as an ontologically separate ‘open work’, but that it should be seen as a feature of all works.<sup>43</sup> Eco replied that he proposed openness as a tendency, not an ontology. Drawing reference from communication and information science (in the *Incontri musicali* pieces he referred to thermodynamics, linguistics and information theory), he outlined a ‘field of probability’, rather than a ‘sequence of events’.<sup>44</sup>

In this sense, the Venice performances served as case studies of how broad a ‘field of probability’ might be. While these categories were to find fame with Eco’s forthcoming *Opera aperta* (1962) and the literary movement it spawned, what is important here is that the ideas were first formulated in a musical context imbued with a rhetoric of postwar crisis: of opera, genre and musical language. These debates became a discursive milieu for a previously overlooked test-run: emergent ideas played

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<sup>41</sup> First in Eco, ‘L’opera in movimento e la coscienza dell’epoca’, *Incontri musicali* 3 (August 1959), 32-54, and then in ‘Apertura e “informazione” nella struttura musicale: uno strumento d’indagine’, *Incontri musicali* 4 (September 1960), 89-104.

<sup>42</sup> Eco, ‘L’opera in movimento e la coscienza dell’epoca’, 33.

<sup>43</sup> D’Amico, ‘Dell’opera aperta, ossia dell’avanguardia’, *Incontri musicali* 4 (September 1960), 89-104. See also, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 82-7.

<sup>44</sup> Eco, ‘Apertura e “informazione” nella struttura musicale’.

out through an itinerant flea, a celebrity circus and a staging of postwar socio-economic crisis.

## Aesthetic divisions and eclectic elisions

When we realise our illness or our secret motivations, we have already begun to put them in crisis. What matters is the way in which we accept our motivations and we live their crisis. And this is the only possibility we have of becoming other than what we are, that is, the only way to enable ourselves to invent a new way of being.<sup>45</sup>

Eco's *Opera aperta* centred on two particular features of the new trend: an emphasis on plurality and multiplicity, and on a more interactive process between reader and text. Both the theory and the avant-garde from which it claimed to grow were positioned against the Crocean aesthetics that had fuelled Italian modernism for much of the century: ideals of intuitive expression, autonomy and unity. Eco drew a new nexus between openness, information, ambiguity and contravention. He saw this constellation as arising from the particularities of modern experience: open works represented the disorder, discontinuity and disobedience of contemporary life. The open work, Eco claimed, sought a way out of crisis through reconfiguring traditional relationships in a fashion representative of the shattered and fragmented.<sup>46</sup>

As has become apparent in this chapter thus far, such a reconfiguration went further than vague notions of openness and ambiguity. Discussion honed in on two interrelated aspects: experimentation for the purposes of communicative disruption, and how the simultaneous reinforcing and collapsing of aesthetic oppositions was seen as creating a sense of diversity and eclecticism. What is more, these ideals had their precursors in the specific ways the music was discussed in the discourse of the 1959 performances. Notions of communicative disruption and contravention focussed on the reconfiguration of text-music relationships. Repeatedly noted to have been a problem of opera across its four-hundred-year history, by the postwar period the

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<sup>45</sup> 'Quando ci rendiamo conto della nostra malattia o delle nostre motivazioni segrete, abbiamo già cominciato a metterle in crisi. Ciò che conta è il modo in cui accettiamo le nostre motivazioni e viviamo la loro crisi. E questa è l'unica possibilità che abbiamo per diventare diversi da come siamo, cioè l'unico modo di metterci ad inventare un modo nuovo di essere'; Calvino, 'Usi politici giusti e sbagliati della letteratura', originally 'Right and Wrong Political Uses of Literature', a lecture delivered at Amherst, 25 February 1976; reprinted in *Saggi, 1945-1985*, vol.1, ed. Mario Barenghi (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 351-60, here 360.

<sup>46</sup> As Eco wrote: the avant-garde artist 'shows his acceptance of the world as it is, in full crisis, by formulating a new grammar that rests not on a system of organization but on an assumption of disorder'; Eco, *The Open Work*, 80.



relationship was the locus of operatic crisis.<sup>47</sup> The three composers were seen as subverting the relationship in its traditional operatic form: Berio and Negri through their effacement of song with gesture and mime, and Bruni Tedeschi in his emphasis on the spoken word. As Massimo Mila claimed: 'If you wished to draw any conclusions from common characteristics, which are perhaps just a matter of coincidence, then these three theatrical works in the programme of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Festival of Contemporary Music would lead to alarming predictions about the future of opera in the full and normal sense of the word, by which we mean a drama that is articulated through music, by the singing of the characters'.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Mila noted, the sung word was almost entirely absent from the works in question. In this regard noise was also an issue: many were disconcerted by the fact that the noisiness and complexities of the musical accompaniment often overwhelmed the words communicated by the actors and singers.<sup>49</sup> Onomatopoeia and noise became mediators in the redrawing of boundaries between sound and sense, expression and representation, opening up new experimental possibilities of sound worlds and dramatic relationships.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> As one critic put it: 'Si è inteso così venire incontro a quegli autori che intendono battere strade diverse dalle solite: si tratta dei rapporti fra la parola e la musica' (It is to be understood as the encounter between those authors who wish to tread paths that are out of the ordinary: to draw on the relationship between words and music); S. R., 'Di Negri e di Bruni Tedeschi: due "opere" rivoluzionarie ieri al Festival', *L'Italia* (24 September 1959). This topic is also discussed in contemporary journals: see, for example, Berio, 'Poesia e musica—un'esperienza', *Incontri musicali* 3 (August 1959), 98-110. Here Berio discusses the possibility of 'uno spettacolo "totale"' (a 'total' spectacle) where it is possible 'realizzare anche un rapporto di nuovo genere tra parola e suono, tra poesia e musica' (to realise a new kind of relationship between word and sound, poetry and music) (99).

<sup>48</sup> 'Se si volessero trarre conclusioni d'ordine generale da un carattere comune che forse è dovuto soltanto a casuale coincidenza, i tre lavori teatrali presentati nel quadro del XXII Festival di Musica Contemporanea autorizzerebbero previsioni allarmanti sull'avvenire dell'opera lirica intesa nel senso pieno e normale del termine: cioè come un'azione drammatica interamente risolta in musica attraverso il canto dei protagonisti'; Mila, 'Il Festival di musica contemporanea: nelle opere nuove cantanti di straforo', *L'espresso* (4 October 1959).

<sup>49</sup> One critic wrote of *Diagramma circolare*, for example, that it was 'Difficile comprendere tutte le parole del testo drammatico, ché tra attori ... e orchestra sembrava ci fosse una tacita (ma non troppo) gara a chi riuscisse a sovrastarsi mentre i cantanti ... cercavano ma spesso inutilmente di far giungere la propria voce al di là del palcoscenico, attraverso il muro del suono di una crepitante orchestrazione' (It was difficult to understand all the words of the dramatic text, since between actors ... and orchestra there seemed to be a tacit (although not very) competition to see who would prevail, while the singers ... tried, often in vain, to project their voices beyond the stage through the wall of sound created by the crackling orchestration); Piero Lorenzoni, 'Concluso il XXII Festival di musica contemporanea: magrissimo bilancio', *La provincia* (1 October 1959). This inaudibility was despite the fact that the speaking protagonists wore microphones. Mila complained that the noise levels of the music hindered the emotional expression of the drama; see Mila, 'Il Festival di musica contemporanea: nelle opere nuove cantanti di straforo'.

<sup>50</sup> Noise was also seen, somewhat paradoxically, as contradicting scenic realism and comprehensibility, while also tipping the music into 'realistic sound effects'. This latter phrase

The issue of noise suggested a further opposition: that between the functional and the aesthetic. If the use of noise often rendered the music compliant to the text, that touched on a deeper concern as to the music's overall purpose. The majority of critics claimed that the music of the three pieces seemed to lose an expressive autonomy, becoming subservient to the action (despite claims by the composers themselves that music drove contemporary theatre). They were disconcerted by the fact that it no longer seemed to matter whether what was heard was new or old, high or low, interesting or not. Indeed, some claimed that the music was purely a coolly detached backdrop to the events unfolding; Bruni Tedeschi's score, for example, was 'governed by a dense contrapuntalism of Hindemithian style, often completely and deliberately impenetrable to the emotions of the story, sometimes instead willing to create appropriate atmospheres'.<sup>51</sup> The music was endlessly labelled 'functional': *Diagramma circolare* was said to be a prose drama with musical accompaniment, while the music of *Allez-hop!* was frequently regarded as purely descriptive of the plot. As one critic wrote:

E si è detto cosa vera, ma negativa e gravissima quando la musica di quest'opera si è voluta definire come 'funzionale'. Funzionalità vuol dire non autonomia d'impulso e spontaneità creativa, ma soggezione o servilità ad una ragione estranea. Infatti questa musica è illustrativa dell'azione che via via sottolinea e commenta.<sup>52</sup>

[Indeed there was truth in the accusation made against this music that it was 'functional', but this charge was both damaging and very serious. Functionality signifies subjection or servitude to an external cause, and not the freedom and spontaneity of creativity. This music is in fact illustrative of the action that it underpins and comments on.]

Furthermore, such functionality was seen as the result of an incorporation of the recent experiences of mass media.<sup>53</sup> Bruni Tedeschi's music was repeatedly called a

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repeatedly crops up in the reception; see, for example, Inizio Fuga, 'Al Festival musicale veneziano: una protesta politica firmata da due industriali', *Gazzetta del popolo* (24 September 1959).

<sup>51</sup> 'governata da un denso contrappuntismo di stile hindemithiano, spesso completamente e volutamente impenetrabile alle emozioni della vicenda, talvolta invece volenterosa di creare appropriate atmosfere'; Mila, 'Il Festival di musica contemporanea: nelle opere nuove cantanti di straforo'.

<sup>52</sup> Alfredo Parente, 'Musiche alle Biennale: le giovani forze alla ricerca di nuove formule per il teatro', *Il mattino* (24 September 1959).

<sup>53</sup> The three composers were also at this time engaged in composing for mass media: Negri, for example, wrote the music for Dino Buzzati's radio comedy *Una ragazza arrivò* (1958-59); a radio opera in one act to a libretto by Giuseppe Brusa, called *Il testimone indesirato* (1959), with electronic

‘soundtrack’;<sup>54</sup> the chorus even dubbed a ‘video layer’;<sup>55</sup> everything occurred ‘as if in a film’.<sup>56</sup> One critic called the sound world of *Il circo Max* ‘tevisual’.<sup>57</sup> But if critics still betrayed anxiety over the uses of new media experiences, the composers’ own perspectives were more complex: on the one hand they actively encouraged such interpretations; Berio even claimed later that *Allez-hop!* ‘ought to slide past just like a film’.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the works seemed to offer a critique of passivity, one that correlated with contemporary critiques of the passivity of new media experience.<sup>59</sup> Such ambivalence in the renegotiation between high and low, and the role that parody played, were also central to the theorising of Eco and the literary *neoavanguardia*. Eco even devoted a chapter to ‘Television and Aesthetics’ in *Opera aperta*, suggesting that there was a ‘rapport’ between the communicative structures of television and the openness of contemporary art.

At the centre of the discourse, then, was a series of reconfigurations—on both levels of production and reception—of older aesthetic oppositions: text and music, sound and sense, functionality and autonomy. In addition, communicative disruption was premised on the contradictory incorporation of and hostility to the enticing experiences of mass media, as well as a perceived crisis of language, the testing of limits of interpretation and the increased role of the spectator in the production of meaning. The simultaneous reinforcement and erasure of these oppositions and means

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mixing done by Maderna at the Studio di fonologia in Milan—a work that won the Prix d’Italia in 1960; and a soundtrack to Luigi Comencini’s film *Le sorprese dell’amore* (1959). Negri’s ability to move seamlessly between high art and popular entertainment is discussed in Giuseppe Di Leva, *Ricordo di Gino Negri: a dieci anni dalla scomparsa* (Milan: Edizioni del Teatro alla Scala, 2001), 15.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, Leonardo Pinzauti, ‘Le nuove avanguardie al Festival veneziano di musica contemporanea’, *Il popolo* (24 September 1959); Lorenzoni, ‘Concluso il XXII Festival di musica contemporanea: magrissimo bilancio’; and Pestalozza, ‘Al Festival di musica contemporanea: si rivela a Venezia un giovane compositore’, *Avanti!* (24 September 1959). The Venice festival that year had also been preceded by an international congress on ‘Opera e balletto nel film’ (7–11 September). The congress was run under the aegis of the Biennale, by the joint endeavours of the music and film festivals.

<sup>55</sup> Eugenio Gara, ‘Un triste diagramma e un allegro circo al Festival’, *L’Europeo* (11 October 1959).

<sup>56</sup> Montale, ‘Diagramma circolare e *Il circo Max*: la nouvelle vague teatrale a Venezia’, *Corriere d’informazione* (24 September 1959). Another commented that Bruni Tedeschi’s work would have been simply the ‘fleeting pictures in the usual cinematic fashion’ if it were not for the commentary; Gino Cucchetti, ‘La rassegna di musiche contemporanee: tre atti unici al Festival di Venezia’, *L’avvenire d’Italia* (24 September 1959).

<sup>57</sup> Giorgio Masin Crovato, ‘Dopo la chiusura del Festival di Venezia: cronache delle musica d’oggi’, *La voce repubblicana* (30 September 1959).

<sup>58</sup> Berio, *Two Interviews: With Rossana Dalmonte and Bálint András Varga* (London: Marion Boyars, 1985), 111.

<sup>59</sup> D’Amico, for example, analysed the degree of passivity involved in reading, theatre, cinema and television, in ‘La televisione e il professor Battilocchio’ (July 1961), reprinted in *I casi della musica*, 444–49.

was done under the banner of a new experimentalism. The music, in its sheer uncategorisability ('who can now determine the exact boundaries between various genres, once so rigidly divided between them?')<sup>60</sup> and complexity, engaged with a deeper sense of crisis provoked by the unsuitability of older, stiffer genres and conventions to represent the present.<sup>61</sup> Thus genre and narrative—like language and convention—became devices to play with in a non-hierarchical way, floating in an intertextual sea.<sup>62</sup>

Levelling and functionality also surfaced in the 1959 discourse with the issues of borrowing and self-borrowing. Critics were disconcerted by the composers' indifference to previously entrenched divisions between old and new, high and low. Some critics simply labelled the works a 'sound collage', neutrally listing the references heard to the classical tradition in Negri's work, or the quotes of Berio's previous pieces in *Allez-hop!* Some even claimed that Negri's transparent references and blatant irony rendered *Il circo Max* simply a sub-par vaudeville:

L'ironia è facile e scoperta. Come è facile riconoscere nella partitura, nonostante la deformazione su ritmi di jazz, pagine di Bach, di Mozart, giù giù fino ai più autorevoli rappresentanti del melodramma romantico, citati con spirito bizzarro. Uno scherzo divertente, che non dovrebbe uscire dall'ambito di un *night-club* o di un avanspettacolo.<sup>63</sup>

[The irony is easy and obvious. It is easy to recognise in the score, despite the deformations by jazz-rhythms, of excerpts from Bach, Mozart, all the way down to the most authoritative representatives of romantic opera, cited with a bizarre spirit. A funny joke that should not have departed from the setting of a night club or a vaudeville.]

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<sup>60</sup> 'chi può oggi stabilire degli esatti confini tra i vari generi, una volta così rigidamente divisi tra loro?'; Luigi Rossi, 'Due novità assolute al Festival di Venezia: nel *Circo Max* mammiferi di lusso', *La notte* (24-25 September 1959).

<sup>61</sup> A contemporary collection of essays on the movement spoke of the new methods of communication as the negation of older ones—in particular, those redolent of capitalist bourgeois society; see Andrea Barbato, ed., *Avanguardia e neo-avanguardia* (Milan: Sugar, 1966).

<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Sanguineti claimed that the basis of communication—namely language and gesture—were not constructed *tabula rasa*, but always maintained a relationship with the past; see Sanguineti, 'Avanguardia, società, impegno', in *ibid.*, 85-100. Berio made the same argument with regard to gesture, in 'Del gesto e di Piazza Carità' (1961), reprinted in Enzo Restagno, ed., *Sequenze per Luciano Berio* (Milan: Ricordi, 2000), 275-77.

<sup>63</sup> 'Al Festival di Venezia: Il *circo Max* satira divertente', *Il piccolo sera* (30 September 1959). Another noted that this use of citation and parody was something 'il teatro di varietà ha già sfruttato da decenni, raggiungendo spesso risultati più esilaranti di quelli conseguiti dal Negri' (variety theatre has already taken advantage of for decades, often obtaining results more hilarious than those achieved by Negri); 'La farsa del festival', *Il punto* (17 October 1959).

Others claimed this re-use was symptomatic of a broader crisis of inspiration: one wrote of *Il circo Max*, that ‘then the question arises whether this caricatured reworking of music not its own is a sign of myopia or creative distress: another sign, that is, of the drying up of inspiration for current music, which takes refuge in similar borrowing and in similar excogitations and discoveries’.<sup>64</sup> Some even saw re-use as the only way of representing the present: a critic claimed of Berio’s piece that, ‘This musical action tells its non-story by way of collage, not because it attempts to disrupt the order of the world, but because there are times when the only order in which the world presents itself is collage’.<sup>65</sup> For others, fragmentation and eclecticism were what made the works so timely: ‘This intention, to remain attached to the chronicler of current events, finds a certain correspondence in the fragmentation of the schemes, of the forms, of the means of yesterday, with the illusory, even if unspoken hope, of creating new ones, for today and tomorrow’.<sup>66</sup> As with Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress* in 1951, musical borrowing was seen as symptomatic of contemporary crisis, but while critics earlier in the decade had sought to co-opt these aspects into a dialectic with the more original aspects of his style, by 1959 critics instead saw eclecticism and citation on their own terms—a sign of creative myopia, perhaps, but not something necessarily to be countered with originality.<sup>67</sup> Rather than emphasise historical distance, the gap between past and present was now seen to be closed through quotation, parody and

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<sup>64</sup> ‘poi ci si domanda se non sia un segno di miopia o di indigenza creativa questa caricaturale rielaborazione di musiche non proprie: un altro segno, cioè, delle inaridite fonti inventive della musica presente, che si rifugia in simili prestiti e in simili escogitazioni e ritrovati’; Parente, ‘Musiche alle Biennale: le giovani forze alla ricerca di nuove formule per il teatro’.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Questa azione musicale racconta la sua non-storia a modo di collage, non perché voglia violentare l’ordine del mondo, ma perché ci sono momenti in cui l’unico ordine in cui il mondo si presenta è il collage’ [underlining in original]; in ‘Opera aperta’.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Questo proposito di rimanere agganciati alla attualità cronachistica, trova una certa corrispondenza nella frantumazione degli schemi, delle forme, dei mezzi di ieri, con la illusoria, anche se sottaciuta speranza, di crearne di nuovi, per oggi e per domani’; Giuseppe Pugliese, ‘XXII Festival di musica contemporanea: due opere in un atto in “prima” mondiale’, *Il gazzettino* (24 September 1959).

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter Two for more on musical borrowing in *The Rake’s Progress*. Berio later commented on Stravinsky’s opera: ‘Le crisi sono soprattutto geografiche o geopolitiche (come dice Kissinger) o geoculturali (come diciamo noi). Oppure sono crisi di rapporto: fra musica e teatro, per esempio. Il momento più alto e intelligente di questa crisi è il *Rake’s Progress* mentre il momento più basso è il Menotti’ (Crises are primarily geographical or geopolitical (as Kissinger says) or geocultural (as we say). Or rather are crises of relationships: between music and theatre, for example. The high point and intellectual peak of this crisis is the *Rake’s Progress* while the low point is Menotti’; Berio, quoted in Paolo Maurizi, *Quattordici interviste sul nuovo teatro musicale in Italia: con un elenco cronologico delle opere (1950-1980)* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2004), 27.

comedy—a seemingly flagrant disregard for the contemporary crisis the pieces were seen both to manifest and represent.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

The discourse that materialised in response to the 1959 performances thus initiated, corroborated and borrowed from a broader contemporary debate on notions of openness and diversity. What is especially important, however, is that many of the ideas seen as synonymous with a slightly later literary *neoavantgardia* were first theorised in a specifically musical context—one more complex than the introductory examples of Eco's book have suggested. While several scholars have sought to resituate a literary postmodernism as emerging in the 1950s, few have attempted the same for music culture.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the three music theatre pieces of 1959 jarred with their surrounding discourse in intriguing ways: in some senses emphatically modernist, but perceived as gesturing towards something other; an instance, perhaps, in which theory and criticism were more postmodern than practice. But what this study of a few previously neglected works and performances has shown—I hope—is that in Italy in the later 1950s something new was recognised as emerging, as much rhetorical as in practice: a trend that challenged prewar modernist conventions at a time when they were also hardening.<sup>70</sup>

The coherence of the concept of the open work is not what is at stake here, nor whether or not it signified postmodernism *per se*; instead it is how new ideas became

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<sup>68</sup> This directly foreshadowed subsequent pronouncements by Eco, such as his postscript to *Il nome della rosa* (Milan: Bompiani, 1980): 'The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently'; in Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Minerva, 1994 [1980]), 67.

<sup>69</sup> One of the few to make a similar argument is Christopher Butler, who claims that something new was emerging as early as the 1950s that broke away from modernism—something which he calls 'post-modern'. But he is dismissive of a musical counterpart, saying that 'it does not seem by and large that any really significant composers have needed to take on any very explicitly postmodern theoretical commitments'; in Butler, *After the Wake: An Essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 7.

<sup>70</sup> The neo-avant-garde thus made obvious reference to the avant-garde of earlier in the century: both required a huge amount of supporting theory, often seen as important as the works themselves. As Pierre Boulez noted, in periods of 'destruction and discovery' (as opposed to when language is being consolidated), 'there are passionate discussions of fundamental problems raised by the weakening of automatic responses, the impoverishment of means of expression and a diminishing power of communication'; see Boulez, 'The Composer as Critic', originally published as 'Probabilités critiques du compositeur', *Domaines musicale* 1 (1954), 1–11; reprinted in Boulez, *Orientalions: Collected Writings*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez and trans. Martin Cooper (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 106–12, here 107.

clustered around this particular concept. In a musical context, this related specifically to the redrawing of aesthetic boundaries and means of communication. The three theatre pieces were representative of the particular nature of postwar crisis, and of the way such a perception seemed to blur definitions of modernism and its boundaries. In staging crisis, then, the pieces in turn staged the polemic of their age: a relentless sense of diversity and eclecticism, tempered at the same time by a need for theoretical order and homogeneity. In the quagmire of postwar musical debate, clashing concepts and contradictory ideals were suddenly focussed in response to a series of performances that staged everything and nothing all at once. Works that made stories out of fleas, celebrities and circuses both profane and profound, enjoyable as satirical review while also enmeshed in something far more unsettling: a timeliness and contemporaneity veiled in notions of openness and ambiguity. Timeliness for a time of crisis.

## Chapter Five

### Remaking Reality: Echoes, Noise and Modernist Realism in Luigi Nono's *Intolleranza 1960*, 1961

We sought to liberate ourselves from the weight of our sins, we  
wanted to look ourselves in the face and tell ourselves the truth, to  
discover who we really were.<sup>1</sup>

Si percorre il deserto con residui  
Di qualche immagine di prima in mente,  
Della Terra Promessa  
Nient'altro un vivo sa.<sup>2</sup>

Othello: What doest thou thinke?  
Iago: Thinke my Lord?  
Othello: Thinke my Lord? By heauen he ecchoes me.<sup>3</sup>

#### Protesting opera

On the evening of 13 April 1961, having crossed Venice's Campo San Fantin, entered the Teatro La Fenice and taken their seats amidst the splendour of red and gold, the public viewed the noisy spectacle of Luigi Nono's latest work, *Intolleranza 1960*. The opera's police cells and concentration camps conspicuously jarred in such theatrical surroundings. Clearly fashioned as a protest work, a rallying call to arms, it was effective in an unintended way: midway through the performance a demonstration was mounted by a group of neo-Fascists from the Ordine Nuovo, who were seated in the upper tier of the theatre.<sup>4</sup> The demonstrators, booing and jeering, threw down pamphlets denouncing *Intolleranza* as a work of political propaganda.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Vittorio De Sica, *La table ronde* (1960); cited in Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London: Continuum, 2003 [1999]), 218.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Ultimi cori per la Terra Promessa* (1960). 'One roams the desert with remnants / of some old early image in mind, / of the Promised Land / a living man knows nothing else'; translated in Joseph Cary, *Three Modern Italian Poets: Saba, Ungaretti, Montale* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 229.

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III. iii, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Penguin, 1996 [1968]), 108.

<sup>4</sup> The Ordine Nuovo, a far-right cultural and political terrorist group founded by Pino Rauti in 1956, was one of the most prominent neo-Fascist organisations in postwar Italy; see Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). *Intolleranza* was performed again on 15 April without disruption. This was not the first indication of a resurgent neo-Fascism in Venice that year: in July a bomb had destroyed a ceramic statue celebrating women partisans of the Resistance—'La partigiana veneta'—installed in the Biennale *giardini* in 1957.

<sup>5</sup> The event might have brought to mind a film made seven years earlier, Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954). Set in the spring of 1866, *Senso* opens with a performance of Verdi's *Il trovatore* at La Fenice. As Manrico strides to the front of the stage and sings 'Di quella pira' directly at the audience, from



disturbance was dismissed in the leftist press as a response to the fact that both Nono and the musical director, Bruno Maderna, were members of the Partito Comunista Italiano (or PCI), rather than to anything in the work.<sup>6</sup> But *Intolleranza's* political resonance was to become the starting point of a wide-ranging debate on the function of music in society.

The experiences of that spring Venetian night were to feed in to contemporary discourses concerning the postwar rebuilding of the Italian nation, discourses among intellectuals who were still coming to terms with wartime experience and its catastrophic climax in 1943–45. This was done in tandem, particularly among the Left, with a reappraisal of the Risorgimento. The publication of Antonio Gramsci's notes on the latter subject, which had appeared only a couple of years after the war, had dominated both public and scholarly discussion over the preceding decade.<sup>7</sup> There was, in other words, widespread analysis of the attempts at revolution that had shadowed the project of a unified Italy over the previous hundred years. A particularly Italian concern with recent history and contemporary society had, only two years previously, been at the centre of Nono's own polemic against ahistoricism, delivered at the Darmstadt Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. In a lecture entitled 'Presenza storica nella musica d'oggi', Nono claimed that contemporary composers had a responsibility to present the social problems and artistic concerns of their time, which should be done simultaneously with a reminder of recent history so that, as the cliché goes, history did not repeat itself.<sup>8</sup>

The question of how *Intolleranza* can be read in light of these debates does not necessarily entail an apocalyptic narrative; to turn Michael André Bernstein's critique

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the highest tier of the theatre Italian patriots throw down leaflets on the Austrian officers below. A precursor from earlier in the century were the Futurist protests at Puccini's operas; for more on the latter see Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 171–72.

<sup>6</sup> Luigi Nono and fellow Venetian Bruno Maderna both joined the PCI in 1952. This was the year in which Einaudi published *Lettere di condannati a morte della resistenza italiana* (Turin, 1952), followed two years later by *Lettere di condannati a morte della resistenza europea* (Turin, 1954). Both were used as sources for Nono's *Il canto sospeso* (1955).

<sup>7</sup> See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1975 [1948]). There is a collection of Gramsci's writing at the Archivio Luigi Nono (ALN) in Venice, with many annotations by the composer. Nono himself stated that: 'Gramsci's thought on the autonomy of confronting models was of great importance at the time'; quoted in Carola Nielinger-Vakil, "'The Song Unsung': Luigi Nono's *Il canto sospeso*", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 131/1 (2006), 83–150, here 97. For more on the rewriting of Risorgimento history, see Chapter Three.

<sup>8</sup> Nono, 'Historical Presence in Music Today' (1959); reprinted in translation in Brian Simms, ed., *Composers on Modern Musical Culture: An Anthology of Readings on Twentieth-Century Music* (Belmont: Schirmer, 1999), 168–74.

of foreshadowing 180 degrees, such events need not be interpreted purely as a belated response to Fascism.<sup>9</sup> Italy in 1961 was, for one thing, undergoing changes unforeseen decades earlier; this was a period of increasing urbanisation, and in particular of immigration from the rural south to the more industrialised north.<sup>10</sup> The human consequences of this disruption were a common trope in literature of the time, and often figured through the experience of overwhelming noise. In Paolo Volponi's novel *Memoriale* (1962) the protagonist, a homesick war veteran seeking work in the north, enjoys an interesting moment of self-reflexivity: 'I write of noise, because the first time that one enters the factory, noise is the most important thing, and more than looking one is listening, and listening unwillingly to that great noise which falls on you like a shower'.<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, sheer noise played an important part in the critics' interpretation of Nono's opera on its opening night.

To set another narrative of change from this period in relief, the late 1950s to early 1960s also marked the consolidation of capitalism via the so-called 'economic miracle', a phase of prolonged economic growth in Italy from the end of the Second World War up until the late 1960s.<sup>12</sup> A new consumerism was evident in the Fiat Seicento and Cinquecento car models that began to fill Italian streets; or in the brightly coloured plastic chairs of Vico Magistretti and Joe Colombo, chairs which were designed not only for sitting on but, more importantly, for looking at, for

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<sup>9</sup> Michael André Bernstein argues against the tendencies of foreshadowing and backshadowing when writing history. He instead promotes sideshadowing, which 'means learning to value the contingencies and multiple paths leading from each concrete moment of lived experience, and recognizing the importance of those moments not for their place in an already determined larger pattern but as significant in their own right'; see his *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 70.

<sup>10</sup> The 1950s and 1960s were the period of greatest movement from the countryside and agrarian society to the city and urban living. In Italy, agriculture as a percentage of GDP fell from 27.5 percent to 13 percent between 1949 and 1960; see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 327.

<sup>11</sup> 'Scrivo del rumore, perché la prima volta che uno entra nella fabbrica il rumore è la cosa più importante, e più che guardare uno sta a sentire e sta a sentire senza volontà quel gran rumore che cade addosso come una doccia'; Paolo Volponi, *Memoriale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981 [1962]), 33. The overwhelming noise of the factory has a longer history: nineteenth-century manuals on workers' health frequently returned to the issue of noise levels in the working environment. For more on the pathology of factory noise, see Chapter Four.

<sup>12</sup> The 'economic miracle' was a period of dramatic industrial growth, when exports doubled and expansion reached an annual rate of eight percent; see Anna Cento Bull, 'Social and Political Cultures in Italy from 1860 to the Present Day', in Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West, *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [2001]), 35-61, here 55. See also Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005).

fetishising as *objets d'art*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this was the height of the Cold War; only the day before the premiere of *Intolleranza*, the Soviet Union had displayed its technological strength by sending Yuri Gagarin into space; in the same year the Berlin Wall had been erected. Communist papers glorified these and other Soviet technical achievements.<sup>14</sup>

A period of great change, then; but also one in which events were pushed into broader and longer-arching narratives—about the potentiality of humanity, or about technology and modernity. An autochthonous tint is also significant. This chapter seeks to probe the limits of modernism as a transnational phenomenon, thus going against the tendency of globalisation narratives, which suggest that by the mid-twentieth century, societies and cultural practices in the West were becoming increasingly homogenised.<sup>15</sup> As part of the destabilising of the idea of a 1945 zero hour, notions of recuperation, heritage and evocation of Italian, and eminently Venetian, traditions suggest a striking degree of aesthetic continuity between the pre-Fascist, Fascist and post-Fascist periods.

### **Bureaucracy, displacement, topicality**

*Intolleranza* tells the story of a nameless Emigrant (tenor) who is desperate to escape his current existence in a desolate mining town and return to his place of origin. The opera traces his journey, sketched as a series of events that subject the protagonist to various instances of intolerance. Part One opens with slogans projected on the stage curtain, accompanied by taped choruses issuing from a series of speakers situated

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<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, increased car ownership led to new levels of noise; as Stefano Pivato notes, 'La rivoluzione in atto nel sistema dei trasporti determina anche una nuova scala di valori nella percezione dei rumori. Il treno, che all'origine era entrato nell'immaginario degli italiani come una delle principali fonti di rumore, veniva ampiamente sovrastato dal fragore delle automobili destinate, nell'arco di qualche decennio, a divenire la principale fonte di disturbo' (The revolution taking place in the transport system also determines a new scale of values in the perception of noise. The train, which originally entered the collective imagination of the Italians as one of the main sources of noise, came to be largely dominated by the roar of the cars destined, within a few decades, to become the principal source of disturbance); Pivato, *Il secolo del rumore: il paesaggio sonoro nel novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 145.

<sup>14</sup> The nature of this coverage may have been in part due to covert Soviet funding of Italian Communist activity. Valerio Riva's *Ora da Mosca: i finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla rivoluzione d'ottobre al crollo dell'URSS* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999) has exposed the high levels of funding from Moscow to Communist groups in Italy during the Cold War.

<sup>15</sup> Nono's promotion of localism—particularly of his own status as a Venetian—is reflected in his interpretation of eurocentrism in his critique of Darmstadt as imperialist. See Mário Vieira de Carvalho, 'Towards Dialectic Listening: Quotation and *Montage* in the Work of Luigi Nono', *Contemporary Music Review* 18/2 (1999), 37-85.

around the theatre. As the curtain rises the audience sees the Emigrant singing of his desire to leave the mines in which he works in the harshest of conditions, an escape that involves leaving behind a Woman (soprano) who has been caring for him.<sup>16</sup> He first heads to a city and becomes caught up in a street demonstration; he is arrested and taken to a police station, then interrogated and tortured. Sentenced to a concentration camp, he immediately plots another escape, along with an Algerian prisoner (baritone).<sup>17</sup> Before Part Two proper begins, the audience is presented with a montage: a mocking of mass culture and a Kafkaesque critique of the illogicality of modern bureaucracy entitled ‘Alcune assurdità della vita contemporanea’ (Some absurdities of contemporary life): voices on tape cry out ‘I documenti sono l’anima dello stato!’ (Documents are the soul of the state!); newspaper adverts read ‘Comunicato speciale! Madre di tredici figli era invece uomo!’ (Special announcement! Mother of thirteen children was actually a man), and ‘Zia dà alla luce due nipoti per mezzo della fecondazione artificiale!’ (Aunt gives birth to two nephews through artificial insemination). When the plot resumes, the Emigrant encounters a woman who becomes his Companion (alto) for the remainder of his journey. They arrive at a town where a dam has been installed to provide hydroelectric power; the river is, as a result, threatening to burst its banks. In a catastrophic dénouement, the dam breaks and the town and its people, including the Emigrant and his Companion, are swept away. A commentary is provided by a series of choruses that intercept, transfigure and intensify the drama: of miners, demonstrators, the tortured, prisoners, emigrants, Algerians and peasants.

These were highly topical events: a mining disaster of 1956 in Marcinelle, Belgium resulted in 262 fatalities (many of whom were Italian immigrants), and which Nono claimed was ‘caused by the criminal negligence on the part of a class for

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<sup>16</sup> The status and treatment of women in the opera is dubious at best: although none of the protagonists is given a proper name, the women are continually placed in subservient relationships to men. This is evident not just in the plot and action, but also in the very manner of their singing.

<sup>17</sup> References to the Holocaust were increasingly ubiquitous at this time. The term itself had only just been introduced—in the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, which began only two days before the premiere of *Intolleranza*. This period marked an explosion of Holocaust imagery and discussion, much of it prompted by Eichmann’s trial: for example, in Italy alone, there appeared the story of the experiences of Italian Jews in Luigi Comencini’s *Tutti a casa* (1960), the tracing of a journey from Paris to the concentration camps of Germany and Poland in Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Kapò* (1960), and Visconti’s *Vaghe stelle dell’Orsa* (1965), in which the Holocaust plot weaves a background thread.

whom the lives of others are an exploitable instrument'.<sup>18</sup> The popular demonstrations in Italy of July 1960, protesting against a Fascist resurgence; the Algerian war of independence from 1954 to 1962; 'Various forms of racial intolerance and outbreaks of neo-Nazism in 1960';<sup>19</sup> and the political unrest between the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) and the PCI—and resulting deaths—caused by the flooding in the Po delta as a result of damming in the 1950s; all support reading the opera as an historical document.

*Intolleranza* was commissioned by Mario Labroca for the Venice Biennale. Correspondence between Nono and his collaborators shows that most of the work was written in only three months, once the Venetian commission was agreed.<sup>20</sup> The drama was directed by the Czech composer and director Václav Kašík, with technical preparation by the Czech artist Josef Svoboda, both members of the Laterna Magika theatre of Prague; the costumes and scenography were by the Venetian artist Emilio Vedova.<sup>21</sup> Divided into two parts, the libretto of *Intolleranza* contained texts by Angelo Maria Ripellino, Henri Alleg, Bertolt Brecht, Aimé Césaire, Paul Éluard, Vladimir Mayakovsky and Jean-Paul Sartre, all of them united by a marked political commitment. Nono also used direct documentation: famous slogans from the first half of the twentieth century, such as 'Nie wieder!' (Never again!), 'No pasaran' (They shall not pass), 'Morte al fascismo e libertà ai popoli!' (Death to fascism and freedom to the people!), 'Down with discrimination!' and 'La sale guerre' (The dirty war); and the use of excerpts from, among others, the cross-examination of the Czechoslovak journalist Julius Fučík by the Nazis, recorded in his account *Reportáž psaná na oprátce*

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<sup>18</sup> 'verursacht durch verbrecherische Fahrlässigkeit einer Klasse, für die das Leben anderer ein auszubeutendes Instrument darstellt'; Nono, 'Einige Genauere Hinweise zu *Intolleranza* (1962)', in Jürg Stenzl, ed., *Luigi Nono: Texte—Studien zu seiner Musik* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1975), 70.

<sup>19</sup> 'Verschiedene Formen der rassistischen Intoleranz und Ausbrüche von Neonazismus 1960'; *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this, see the series of letters printed in Angela Ida De Benedictis and Giorgio Mastinu, eds., *Intolleranza 1960: a cinquant'anni dalla prima assoluta* (Venice: Marsilio, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> The Laterna Magika collaboration was central to Nono's conception. A non-verbal drama developed in Prague and first showcased at the Expo '58 in Brussels, the theatre company was originally formed and led by Josef Svoboda and the director Alfréd Radok. Building on the work of German theatre director Erwin Piscator, it arose from a desire to incorporate techniques of film and theatre into a new media experience, achieved partly through the technique of 'polykran'—multiple projections onto screens. This aspect was particularly appealing to Nono: the theatre's experiments with sound projections paved the way for his spatialisation of sound in *La Fenice*. For more on this, see Enzo Restagno, ed., *Nono* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987). Svoboda had in fact prepared photographic slides for use in the premiere of *Intolleranza*, but Nono eventually settled for Emilio Vedova's abstract projections.

(Notes from the Gallows, 1947), in the scene of the police interrogation.<sup>22</sup>

The scenic accompaniment to the drama consisted of a series of placards smothered in montages of newspaper cuttings, photos and abstract paintings, simultaneous with projections of images and video clips (see Figure 1):



Figure 1: Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza 1960*.  
© Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena

The backdrop was thus heavily stylised, retaining a degree of detachment from the unfolding events, hindering the believability of the drama. This effect was augmented not only by the mixed media extravaganza of the scenery but also by the fact that at times such a backdrop hid the faces of the figures onstage. Yet in many ways it also reinforced the potency of the ‘realities’ of the drama: the angular lines of black and bright red in Vedova’s paintings heightened the disturbing force of the music; the movement of images across the stage furthered the sense of immersion provided by

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<sup>22</sup> Julius Fučík was arrested, tortured and executed by the Nazis for his activities with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC). He wrote the book on cigarette paper while still in prison. The text is a classic example of Marxist utopianism, moving from an account of his incarceration to an outline of what a Communist future might look like.

the distribution of sounds through loudspeakers; and the playing of documentary footage gave a window onto the events referred to in the drama. This concern with contemporaneous goings on is evident from the earliest stages of the scenographic design: space imagery was drawn and printed on the sketches and models made by Svoboda—floating planets, astronauts and space rockets—that gesture towards space travel (see Figure 2). In the final version of 1961, alongside the abstract projections that accompanied the demonstration in the city (Part One, Scene 3), there was video footage of police charges at street demonstrators, reinforcing the sense that what is seen on stage also happens outside the theatre.

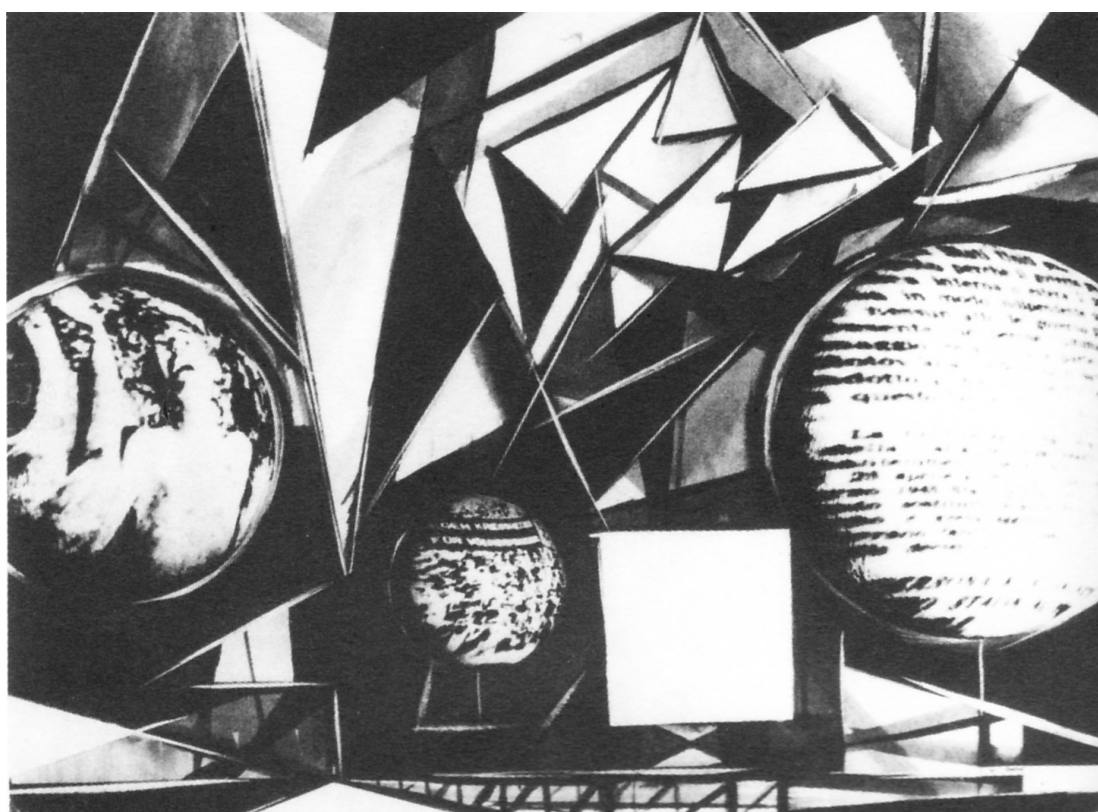


Figure 2: Sketch for Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza* 1960.  
Archivio Luigi Nono, Venice—© Luigi Nono heirs

Nono and his leftist critics hoped that, by being both immersed in and unsettled by the theatre, the audience would be encouraged towards a reappraisal of current society, thus realising the oppression and intolerance around them, regardless of their improved quality of life.<sup>23</sup> The composer claimed that traditional opera had

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<sup>23</sup> People no longer needed to leave home: entertainment was broadcast directly into the sitting room, and food could be stored in newly acquired refrigerators. Judt notes that by 1974 Italy owned the

long since failed to achieve the provocative, unsettling effects needed to counteract the increasing passivity of consumerist existence. Nono's consternation at the sacralisation of opera, of people hearing the same things again and again with an unquestioning attitude, was interlinked with a wider fear of passivity.<sup>24</sup> As he said of the move from an old-fashioned concept of theatre to the recent music theatre of Schoenberg and the militant drama of Brecht:

An die Stelle einer in wesentlichen statisch-theologischen Konzeption der traditionellen europäischen Oper (ein einziger optischer Brennpunkt; eine einzige Klangquelle; liturgisches Verhältnis zwischen Publikum und Bühne, das Ganze in starrer Weise bestimmt [...]) tritt eine dynamische Konzeption wechselnder Beziehungen (größere Fülle an Dimensionen und Elementen für die dramatische Komposition—infolgedessen Erweiterung der aktiven Teilnahme des Publikums—Möglichkeit optischer Brennpunkte und Klangquellen im ganzen Saal—daraus folgende Erweiterung des Verhältnisses Raum.<sup>25</sup>

[In place of an essentially static theological conception of traditional European opera (a single visual focal point, a single sound source, a liturgical relationship between the audience and the stage, the whole determined in a rigid manner [...]), comes a dynamic conception of changing relationships (a greater abundance of dimensions and elements for a dramatic composition, as a consequence of its extension of the active participation of the audience; the possibility of visual focus points and sources of sound throughout the hall, and the consequent expansion of the relationship between space and time).]

Nono was not the only composer in Italy trying to reinvigorate music theatre. Indeed, Raymond Fearn sees 1960 as a watershed: a year during which young composers began decisively to reengage with the stage.<sup>26</sup> While there was indeed a sudden frequency of new works, such as Giacomo Manzoni's *La sentenza* (1960) and Maderna's *Don Perlimplin* (1961), the idea of a sudden theatrical turn is more debateable. Such reengagement can better be traced to developments over the

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highest number of refrigerators in Europe, with 94 percent of households having one. Italy also became Europe's leading manufacturer; Judt, *Postwar*, 338-39. The novelist Alberto Moravia claimed such affluence was leading to perceptions of anti-humanism: 'The man of the neo-capitalist age, with his refrigerators, his supermarkets, his mass-produced cars, his missiles and his television sets, is so bloodless, insecure, devitalised and neurotic that he provides every justification for those ready and anxious to accept his decline as a positive fact, and reduce him to the position of an object among other objects'; Moravia, 'Preface (1963)', in *Man as an End: A Defence of Humanism*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965 [1963]), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Nono's response to such sacralisation was to critique performance practice. See, for example, his essay 'Notizen zum Musiktheater Heute' (1961), in Stenzl, *Luigi Nono*, 61-67.

<sup>25</sup> Nono, 'Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit eines neuen Musiktheaters'; *ibid.*, 94.

<sup>26</sup> Raymond Fearn, *Italian Opera Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1998).



preceding decade and in response to theatrical initiatives in other cultural media.<sup>27</sup> *La sentenza* and *Don Perlimplin*, however, have much in common with *Intolleranza*: all three are theatrical works of overt political commitment that attempt to integrate recent models (Brecht, Piscator, Sartre) with reminiscences of the Italian operatic tradition, all sewn together into a post-Schoenbergian sound world. To use Pierluigi Petrobelli's distinction, these are works that form part of the trend of Italian music characterised by 'seriousness' and 'commitment', in which

the composers who belong to this trend express themselves verbally in lucid prose, sometimes even in a kind of manifesto. The artists I like to place in this category see themselves as active and responsible members of society; they see their art as a means by which to propose and then project a programme, an artistic credo.<sup>28</sup>

However, Italy's economic miracle was for music theatre a double-edged sword: whilst it enabled funding for larger-scale works, it also aided the rapid proliferation of mass media technologies. Cinema attendance rose dramatically in the decade after the war, eventually giving way in the late 1950s and early 1960s to increasing television ownership;<sup>29</sup> at the same time, theatre audiences had halved by the end of the decade.<sup>30</sup> To save theatre from obsolescence, the cultural elite decided that the experiences of cinema and television needed to reinvigorate the medium, just

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<sup>27</sup> As Nono said, 'Ich hatte in der Tat seit Jahren die Möglichkeit einer Bühnenkompositionen untersucht' (I had in fact been examining the possibility of a stage composition for years); see his 'Einige genauere Hinweise zu *Intolleranza*' [1962], in Stenzl, *Luigi Nono*, 68. Prior to *Intolleranza*, Nono had been working on two other music theatre projects: in a notebook of preliminary ideas entitled 'Per il teatro', he wrote on one page ' - /Anne Frank - / si ascolta / si vede non la storia', an idea that he had discussed in correspondence with Ungaretti in 1957 and 1958; another note mentions 'Tortura - / Alleg -', concerned with the Algerian resistance. See Nielinger-Vakil, 'Between Memorial and Political Manifesto: Nono's Anti-Fascist Pieces, 1951-1966', *International Nono Conference* (Padua, in press); my thanks to the author for an advance copy.

<sup>28</sup> Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'On Dante and Italian Music: Three Moments', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/3 (1990), 219-49, here 219-20. Luigi Pestalozza also notes that 'Fenomeno tipicamente italiano è stato anche la militanza attiva di molti musicisti non solo nella politica in generale, bensì proprio nel lavoro politico musicale, con forte impegni riformatore' (A typical Italian phenomenon has also been the active militancy of many musicians, not only in politics in general, but in their political work in music, with strong commitment to reform); Pestalozza, 'Musica e resistenza', *Musica/Realtà* 68 (2002), 121-40, here 125-27.

<sup>29</sup> Although Italy was initially slow on the uptake of televisions, by 1970 it was Europe's largest manufacturer. Ownership at the time of *Intolleranza* was still relatively low, however, with 12% of Italian families owning a television in 1958, rising to 49% by 1965. Rather, it was a sense of threat that dominated discourse; see Paul Ginsborg, 'Family, Culture and Politics in Contemporary Italy', in Barański and Robert Lumley, eds., *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 21-49; and Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano*, 148.

<sup>30</sup> For more on this, see 'The Age of Affluence', in Judt, *Postwar*, 324-53.

as the Laterna Magika had attempted only a few years before in Prague. We see this concern in newspaper reviews of *Intolleranza*: in Manzoni's claim of the work's importance 'in the new musical theatre of our time, and in a fight for the renewal of the avant-garde';<sup>31</sup> or Massimo Mila in *L'espresso*, 'Such a work is, in terms of accomplishment, without precedent';<sup>32</sup> or Luigi Pestalozza in *Cinema nuovo*, 'It is not only the work of a great musician, but it is a work that poses and solves a problem of theatre'.<sup>33</sup> Leftist intellectuals saw the increasing economic prosperity of the working classes and their enjoyment of new mass entertainments as leading to a muting of the desire for revolution. The perceived offshoot of this was that former Fascist ministers and officials were being reinstated in government positions, seemingly without the public being aware. Indeed the postwar Republican state comprised many bureaucrats from the Fascist period; Tony Judt states that in 1971, 95 percent of Italy's senior civil servants had also served during the Fascist regime.<sup>34</sup> The widely held fear was that if people forgot the oppression and intolerance the Fascist Party had perpetrated, then the regime might be reborn.

### Echoing voices, unseen bodies

Before the curtain had risen at La Fenice, the audience heard sounds that at first it could not place. Fragments of choral singing emanated from four loudspeaker groups: one on the stage, three others placed around the perimeter of the auditorium. A pre-recorded chorus sang a poem by Ripellino, 'Vivere è stare svegli'. The sound was distant and ethereal, giving a sense of both temporal and geographical distance, as if to reinforce its literal coming from elsewhere. The first line was relayed through the onstage speakers; before 'Vivere' had entirely faded, its echoing tones cut into new sounds. The transfer of its syllables, 'Vi-ve-re', each linked by a series of diagonal lines on the score, reverberated between altos and sopranos, echoing across the theatrical space. This effect was continued at the first climactic moment of unison at bb. 3-4, the loudest point so far (*mf*), with the splintering of syllables between vocal parts (see

<sup>31</sup> 'nel teatro musicale del nostro tempo, e nel quadro della lotta per un rinnovamento dell'avanguardia'; Giacomo Manzoni, 'Intolleranza 1960 alla Fenice', *L'Unità* (14 April 1961).

<sup>32</sup> 'Un'opera simile costituisce, dal punto di vista della realizzazione, un fatto senza precedenti'; Massimo Mila, 'Intolleranza 1960 di Nono: anatomia del nostro tempo', *L'espresso* (23 April 1961).

<sup>33</sup> 'Essa cioè non è soltanto l'opera di un grande musicista, ma è un'opera che pone e risolve un problema di teatro'; Pestalozza, [Untitled], *Cinema nuovo* (June 1961).

<sup>34</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 257.

**I. TEIL**

Vorhang noch geschlossen – Alles dunkel – Projektionen mit Schriften

**INIZIO**

The score is written for Soprano (S) and Alto (A) voices. It features a 3/4 time signature and a tempo of approximately 56 beats per minute. The lyrics are: *Lebendig ist wer wach bleibt*. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *f*, *pp*, and *p*. There are handwritten annotations in black ink, including 'INIZIO' at the beginning and '2.' in a large bracketed section at the bottom right. The score is presented on a page with a dark background, suggesting it is a projection.

*Lebendig ist wer wach bleibt*

**2.**

The second part of the score continues the vocal lines for S and A. The lyrics are: *das Bessere hingibt niemals rednet.*. It includes dynamic markings like *pp* and *p*. The tempo is marked as *(♩ = 56 ca)*. The score is also annotated with '2.' in a large bracketed section.

*das Bessere hingibt niemals rednet.*

**2.**

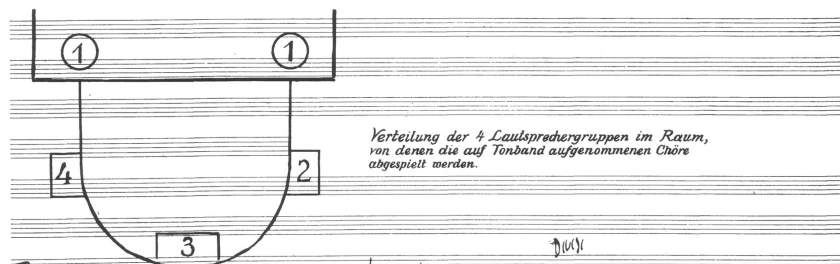
A  
T  
B

*Lebendig*

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<sup>35</sup> This spatialisation of syllables, aided by technological manipulation, was first essayed in *Il canto sospeso*.

6  
S  
A  
sich den anderen schenkt



Verteilung der 4 Lautsprechergruppen im Raum, von denen die auf Tonband aufgenommene Chöre abgespielt werden.

15  
S  
T  
B  
ist wer das Lieber liebt seine Begräbnisse seine

Musical Example 1: *Intolleranza* 1960 by Luigi Nono.

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Thus the sounds of the opening chorus immediately surrounded and immersed the audience, something achieved through the use of echo effects. The words may still have been just about decipherable; but at later moments, such as the interlude on

bureaucracy and mass entertainment, the noisiness of taped sounds and voices reached a peak and the echoing obscured the words almost completely. This was the moment at which the Ordine Nuovo disrupted the performance, throwing down leaflets, booing and condemning the work as communist propaganda; as Giorgio Vigolo remarked in *Il mondo*: ‘the troublemakers had not reckoned with the powerful stereo amplifiers that irradiated the room with the choruses on tape, which, launched at maximum volume, countered the edges of the boos, seeming to crush and swallow like pythons any extraneous sound, every hiss more deafening’.<sup>36</sup> Dynamics became part of the drama, a testing of the audible. Indeed, so much of the score was written at *fff* that the effect almost became routine. If the very first phrase ascended from nothing and descended back to nothing, this mid-point scene reached the other extreme: the sheer loudness made all but a sense of noise inaudible.

These echo effects in *Intolleranza*—both material and allegorical—can be a starting point for reading the powerful evocations mentioned by the critics. More specifically, echoes offer a way of exploring the historical impulses that make up this particular modernist soundscape. We find reverberations of heritage and history in modernist literature of the period too: Dante resounding in the poetry of Eugenio Montale; Petrarch in that of Salvatore Quasimodo; Pier Paolo Pasolini’s references to the tercets of Dante’s *Divina commedia*. What is more, the idea of the echo as an auditory phenomenon had a long Venetian history. Goethe wrote in his travel journal on 7 October 1786 of arranging to hear the ‘famous singing’ of the Venetian gondoliers, who exchanged verses of Tasso and Ariosto across the lagoon:

The singer sits on the shore of an island, on the bank of a canal or in a gondola, and hears it. He knows the melody and the words and answers with the next verse. The first singer answers again, and so on. Each is the echo of the other.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, Venetian echoes articulate the architectural spaces. If today you find yourself in the city and walk towards La Fenice, along the Calle de Veste or the Calle de la Verona, you will hear a steady stream of shuffles and murmurs from unseen

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<sup>36</sup> ‘i disturbatori non avevano fatto i conti i potenti amplificatori stereofonici con cui venivano irradiati nella sala i cori incisi su nastri, i quali, lanciati al massimo volume, per contrastare le bordate dei fischi, parevano stritolare e ingoiare come pitoni ogni rumore estraneo, ogni sibilo più assordante’; Giorgio Vigolo, *Intolleranza 1960*, *Il mondo* (2 May 1961).

<sup>37</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786-1788*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Meyer (London: Collins, 1962), 77.

people;<sup>38</sup> if you detour and enter an interior such as the Basilica di San Marco, you find yourself at the site of a choral tradition based on this very idea of disembodied echoes, of voices from heaven resounding in liturgical space.<sup>39</sup> Goethe's diary entry on 3 October 1786 mentions a service in the Conservatorio in which 'the women were singing an oratorio behind the choir screen; the church was filled with listeners, the music beautiful and the voices superb'.<sup>40</sup> Here, rather than political authority, such singing is imbued with the authority of the word of God, a music that speaks for those present, singing what they cannot themselves express. As we shall see, the incorporation of this tradition of vocal authority into Nono's own aesthetic raises questions as to the political effectiveness of *Intolleranza*.

There are multifaceted echo effects at play in Nono's opera: on the one hand, in the realism of the noisiness; on the other, in a more mechanistic sense, in the way the idea of the echo is used to bring the off-stage into the drama. To quote Carolyn Abbate (writing about Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*), echoes 'can "bring the beyond" downstage'.<sup>41</sup> This expansion of the dramatic realm heightens the sense of an immersive theatrical space in *Intolleranza*. Interestingly, Abbate also likens echo effects to loudness (the magical effect of transmission over large distances), something referred to in Goethe's diary. Thus, from the gondoliers' songs to Monteverdi's choruses, the use of echoes to carry voices across the large interior and exterior spaces of Venice has a long heritage.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Street noise has a long history in writing on Venice: John Ruskin, for example, wrote of the back-alleys 'full of people, and resonant with cries of itinerant salesmen,—a shriek in their beginning, and dying away into a kind of brazen ringing, all the worse for its confinement between the high houses of the passage along which we have to make our way'; Ruskin, Notebook (from *Stones of Venice*, vol. 10), 80, M1 ts. Ruskin Library, Lancaster University.

<sup>39</sup> This idea of Venice as a multisensory, immersive space is also discussed by Renzo Cresti, in Cresti, ed., *Venezia: autori, musiche e situazioni* (Bologna: Quaderni di Octandre, 1993), 10.

<sup>40</sup> Goethe, *Italian Journey*, 67. The powerful effect of disembodied echoes is also depicted in Franz Kafka's *The Investigations of a Dog* (1933). A young dog's life is transformed when he encounters a pack of dogs who emanate a strange music they cannot be seen to produce. This music 'seemed to come from all sides, from the heights, from the deeps, from everywhere, seizing the listener by the middle, overwhelming him, crushing him, and over his swooning body'; in *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976), 531. Echoing voices from unseen bodies are a recurring theme in Kafka: in *The Castle* there is 'the echo of voices singing at an infinite distance', that emanate from an ever-powerful castle that no one seems to inhabit; Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 27. Nono's annotated copies of Kafka's works can be found in Nono's personal library, held at the ALN.

<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 27.

<sup>42</sup> Previous operas have also used this Venetian tradition of the echo, such as the gondolier's songs in Rossini's *Otello* (1816). The opera, set entirely in Venice, uses the echoes of gondoliers as what we might anachronistically call *acousmatic* voices. Whereas the audience of *Otello* may have remembered

Disembodiment and its relaying through echo effects in opera is nothing new.<sup>43</sup> What is significant is that the voice heard but not seen is often endowed with ultimate authority; from the perspective of twentieth-century political theory, it becomes the word of law.<sup>44</sup> In *Intolleranza*'s first scene, set in the mining village, as the Emigrant sings of his homesickness and desire to return to his place of origin, it is the chorus of miners (relayed through two groups of loudspeakers) that further lends credence to his statements, at times overwhelming his song. They extract phrases from the Emigrant's line and echo them back, as in the full choral reiteration of 'il desiderio di tornare nella mia terra' (the desire to return to my homeland).<sup>45</sup> There are numerous references to the power of these choruses in the reception of *Intolleranza*, often with religious undertones: as Laura Fuà wrote in the *Giornale del popolo*, 'In the chorus, which by virtue of megaphones and skilful technical devices invades the scene from every side and oppresses the listening experience with the violence of a judgment of God, Nono has found his most expressive mode';<sup>46</sup> Mila wrote in *La Scala* of, 'the dissolving timbres of the choruses, which sometimes seem almost annulled for a luminous excess charge'.<sup>47</sup> The reviews often suggest that it was the unseen choruses and voices that were most overwhelming and intriguing. These disembodied voices were given the lines requiring most reflection: they had poetry rather than dialogue,

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this Venetian tradition, those in attendance at *Intolleranza* would most likely have only recalled its operatic afterlife. Petrobelli notes that by 1816 it was a tradition almost entirely forgotten; see his 'On Dante and Italian Music', 229-30. Even Goethe, writing in 1786, called it one 'of the half-forgotten legends of the past'; see his *Italian Journey*, 77. Paolo Prato's recent study contradicts this, however: he cites evidence that the practice goes somewhat later—becoming increasingly obsolete by 1850, but still continuing into the twentieth century; see Prato, *La musica italiana: una storia sociale dall'Unità a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Recording technology aided and abetted more established vocal technologies. For more on the importance of the old in histories of technology, see David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (London: Profile Books, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> See Mladen Dolar's recent contribution, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics—in *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1998 [1976]) and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010 [2008]); and also Giorgio Agamben, particularly *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) and *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> This might be another echo back to Puccini and earlier twentieth-century aesthetics: the *Intolleranza* scene bears a striking similarity to the opening of *La fanciulla del West* (1910). Here too a miner pines for his homeland, amplified by a chorus that sings 'là lontano, là lontano, chi ti rivedrà?' What is more, echo effects resound from his song and send it back round the opera house, magnifying his sentiment. Thanks to Arman Schwartz for pointing out this connection.

<sup>46</sup> 'Nei cori, che per virtù di megafoni e di abili accorgimenti tecnici invadono la scena da ogni lato e opprimono l'ascoltare con la violenza di un giudizio di Dio, Nono ha trovato i suoi accenti più espressivi'; Laura Fuà, [Untitled], *Giornale del popolo* (14 April 1961).

<sup>47</sup> 'i timbri dissolti dei cori, che talvolta paiono quasi annullarsi per un eccesso di carica luminosa'; Mila, [Untitled], *La Scala* (June 1961).

and they extracted important phrases from the dialogue of others, echoing them back.

These different modes created a rupture in *Intolleranza*: between the speech uttered by the characters on stage and the language of the choruses on tape. The former were relatively mundane, fragmented, daily utterances; the latter were powerful voices, heard but not seen. However, as the work unfolded, Nono gradually broke down the division: by bringing onstage the offstage drama, he rendered any distinction between them redundant.<sup>48</sup> The choruses possessed a certain agency in the drama, then, while also occupying a position exterior to it: the sound source could not be seen on stage, yet at times it commented on and intercepted the realism of the onstage drama. The Emigrant existed at the opposite extreme, and was oppressed by onstage physical power (he was at the mercy of the other characters and of the hostile landscape) and offstage vocal power (the taped choruses at times interrupt and engulf his song).<sup>49</sup>

Vocality in *Intolleranza* was in this way politicised. While the onstage characters were busy articulating their roles in the drama, the offstage choruses suggested how the audience might change their existence (in other words, they conveyed the political meaning of the work). At the very beginning of the opera there was no visual drama. The taped choral rendition of the opening poem suggested what the work was going to be about: the disembodied singing was an example of an *acousmètre commentateur*, the disembodied as narrative voice-over. Phrases came from nothing and descended back to nothing. The orchestral interlude that followed and comprised the second half of the introduction broke this initial aura. Indeed this rupture (bb. 39-40) was the first point of heightened aural drama, a moment of sheer noise (see Musical Example 2). After the close listening required of the opening vocal phrases beginning and ending *pianissimo*, with their scattered syllables, what followed was brash *fff* brass and percussion, with clichéd sonic effects: tremolos, crescendos and brazen vibrato. Sheer noise became potent in reinforcing the political resonances.

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<sup>48</sup> Conversely, Nono said that the relationship between diegetic dialogue and non-diegetic accompaniment in film is an echo of the relationship between voices and orchestra in traditional opera: film is merely an industrialised version of traditional opera; see Nono, 'Notizen zum Musiktheater Heute' [1961], 61-67.

<sup>49</sup> This fraught relationship between man and landscape is a key topos of the period. A few years later, Michelangelo Antonioni, in *Il deserto rosso* (1964), explored similar themes. Through the use of colour photography, Antonioni examined the correspondence between characters and their environment—here an oil refinery in Ravenna. The heightened modernity damages the characters: their interior psychological disarray is portrayed by miscolouring everyday objects.





Handwritten musical score for 'Intolleranza 1960' by Luigi Nono, page 9. The score consists of multiple staves with complex notation, including various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. A circled '42' is at the top left. The word 'RAC' is written on the right side of the score.

Musical Example 2: *Intolleranza* 1960 by Luigi Nono.  
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## The debate in *L'Unità*: Gramsci, television and popularity

Interpretations of noise in the opera were central to the debate that appeared in *L'Unità* after the premiere.<sup>50</sup> Manzoni initiated discussion with a series of articles defending Nono's use of modernist musical means to express a political text.<sup>51</sup> He suggested that controversy about such music was at the centre of the contemporary artist's dilemma: whether it was possible to use modernist language to expose social problems. Several important questions arose in the ensuing exchanges. The first concerned what 'popular' might mean in contemporary Italian society, and began by a question in the academic Ugo Duse's open letter to Manzoni: 'Who and what allows us, for example, to define *Intolleranza 1960* as a work that is truly popular?'<sup>52</sup> This can be seen as a reconfiguration of a Gramscian concept: in response to the emerging threat of the consolidation of Fascist power in the period of his leadership of the PCI (1922-6), Gramsci strove to form an alliance of proletariat, peasantry and intellectuals—a 'national-popular' alliance.<sup>53</sup> The critics' concern about the popularity of *Intolleranza* was, in other words, symptomatic of an unease felt by the PCI that the glorification of intellectuals, whom Gramsci placed at the centre of the party, was failing to engage the majority. For this new cultural party to achieve broader power

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<sup>50</sup> A noteworthy omission from the debates on *Intolleranza* was the earlier work done on noise by the Futurists, notably Luigi Russolo's manifesto of 1913, *L'arte dei rumori*. The reason for this could be that by 1961 the Futurist legacy was seen as entwined with that of Fascism—and thus anathema to the leftwing sensibility of these debates. This of course distorts the fact that the Futurists had exerted a strong influence on the Left; see Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996). The Futurist manifesto is remarkably prescient with regard to Nono's opera: Russolo's call for electronic and new technological capabilities to enable composers to expand the traditional range of orchestral timbres is echoed in the sounds of *Intolleranza*. For the manifesto, see Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. Barclay Brown (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986); for more on Russolo, see Giovanni Lista, *Luigi Russolo e la musica futurista* (Milan: Mudima, 2009). For more on the Futurists in Venice, see the Prologue.

<sup>51</sup> 'l'accusa contro le violenze, le torture e l'intolleranza di marca nazista in auge nel "mondo libero"'; Manzoni, 'Intolleranza 1960 stasera a Venezia', *L'Unità* (13 April 1961). See also 'Intolleranza 1960 alla Fenice' and 'L'opera di Luigi Nono, la gazzarra fascista e un'interpellanza', *L'Unità* (19 April 1961).

<sup>52</sup> 'Chi e che cosa ci autorizza ad esempio a definire *Intolleranza 1960* un'opera veramente popolare?'; Ugo Duse, 'Intolleranza 1960, fascisti e politica culturale borghese', *L'Unità* (29 April 1961).

<sup>53</sup> For more on this, see Gramsci, 'People, Nation and Culture', in David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, eds. and trans., *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 196-286. It is also worth noting that, in Italy, mass and popular culture, at least in the earlier part of the century, tended to be defined differently. Whereas *cultura di massa* was seen as the newly dominating media of radio, cinema and television, created by an elite to control the broader populace, *cultura popolare* was seen as arising from the populace themselves for their own consumption; see Barański and Lumley, 'Introduction', in Barański and Lumley, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, 1-17. The undoing of the cultural Left was that they failed to recognise the changing parameters of these definitions: as the two became enmeshed, and *cultura di massa* became *cultura popolare*, the Left's denouncement of the former fell on deaf ears.

and appeal, an intellectual from the working class, what Gramsci called an ‘organic intellectual’, was needed to take charge and effect change.

One aspect deemed popular in the debate on *Intolleranza* was its subject matter.<sup>54</sup> Echoes of recent events, critics assumed, were enough to make the work appealing to a broader public. The other main reference to popularity was in the espousal of a new theatre that built on the experiences of the mass media. For theatre to become a medium popular enough to challenge the ascendancy of television and other mass entertainment, it had to achieve consensus among a broad populace. Pestalozza wrote in the Socialist daily *Avanti!* that: ‘The direction of movement, which brings to the theatre the experiences of cinema and television’ eliminates ‘the traditional baggage’ of the theatre.<sup>55</sup> The underlying message here, and in the general debate on *Intolleranza*, seems to be that failure to reinvigorate theatre would result in cultural irrelevance, and that the experiences of new media provided a way out of traditional problems.

In this respect the characteristics listed so far as belonging to *Intolleranza*—disembodiment, echo effects and immersive noise—relate not only to the Italian operatic tradition but also as a response to the cultural dominance of cinema and the increasing ubiquity of television. Disembodiment and sonic effect had become superior techniques with the advent of sound cinema, and Nono was reincorporating and experimenting with the potential of these techniques in the theatre. In this context, *Intolleranza* marks an interesting turning of the tide in the influence of sound cinema on opera production. Less than a decade before, one strand of postwar Italian cinema—art-house films of the self-styled *auteurs* who were predominantly leftist—was much influenced by operatic practice (think back to the opening of Luchino Visconti’s *Senso*, for example). Now opera was seeking cultural legitimacy in response to cinema.

One of the main models for *Intolleranza* was, in this sense significantly, a film: D.W. Griffiths’s hit of the silent era, *Intolerance* (1916). Indeed Nono’s first mention

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<sup>54</sup> This point is perhaps most forcibly argued by M. Ugolini, in ‘Il nostro dibattito su *Intolleranza* 1960 e le musica moderna. Contenuti popolari e stile accademico’, *L’Unità* (6 June 1961). For critic Giuliano Scabia, *Intolleranza* was ‘undoubtedly a popular work’, because it arose out of a significant common experience; see Scabia, ‘Il dibattito su *Intolleranza* 1960 e i compositori moderni: musica popolare e realismo’, *L’Unità* (9 June 1961).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Regia di movimento, che porta in teatro le esperienze del cinema e della televisione, eliminando il tradizionale bagaglio’; Pestalozza, ‘Attesa a Venezia per *Intolleranza* 1960’, *Avanti!* (13 April 1961).

of *Intolleranza* appears in a letter of 25 September 1957 to the German writer Alfred Andersch, announcing that he wanted to compose a work ('theme: intolerance') based on Griffiths's film.<sup>56</sup> The realist concerns of *Intolerance* are first and foremost with visual spectacle. The director famously wanted to create as 'realistic' an impression of Babylon as possible: the outdoor set was the largest Hollywood had thus far created, with numerous chariots, white elephants and thousands of extras. In Nono's use of *Intolerance*—as well as of more recent sound cinema—to create the sense of immersion and movement (what Vigolo called 'an ultra-dynamic audiovisual synthesis'<sup>57</sup>) in audience experience, he turned the techniques back onto the new media as a critique. If such techniques had become both stultifying and intoxicating with the advent of television, then for Nono's critics the importance of *Intolleranza* lay in its break with the passivity of such new media. One such critic, Pestalozza, praised *Intolleranza's* directness in numerous articles: writing in *Avanti!*, for example, he applauded the way 'the choral elements, the vocal tools, always converge to form a miraculous essential communicativeness'.<sup>58</sup>

There was also a politically darker threat of passivity, one that echoed in recent history: the postwar period was dominated by debates about whether the Resistance had been a failed revolution, just as Gramsci had claimed of the Risorgimento. The Left asserted that a passive populace had allowed Fascism to gain hegemony, and although the Resistance had played a part in the regime's undoing, it had failed to instigate any lasting change. Nono's evocations of Brechtian epic theatre—*Intolleranza's* stylised scenery of placards, graffiti and slogans, assaults on the audience through shouting and screaming, the way the music seemed to interrupt and comment on the drama—were continuously employed, never allowing the spectators to become too caught up in what was happening onstage.

Stylised scenography for a politically engaged drama also has precursors in earlier epic theatre, namely the work of Erwin Piscator and the Russian theatre

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<sup>56</sup> For more on this, see De Benedictis, 'L'opera nel racconto ... *Intolleranza 1960*, dietro le quinte di un esordio', in De Benedictis and Mastinu, *Intolleranza 1960*, 57-111.

<sup>57</sup> 'una ultradinamica sintesi audiovisiva'; Vigolo, *Intolleranza 1960*.

<sup>58</sup> 'dei mezzi corali, strumentali vocali, converge sempre a una prodigiosa essenzialità comunicativa'; Pestalozza, 'Espressionismo e realismo epico nel nuovo dramma di Luigi Nono', *Avanti!* (14 April 1961).

director Vsevolod Meyerhold.<sup>59</sup> These dramatists also saw theatre as a stage for political ideas and political agitation. As Pestalozza wrote,

Soprattutto notevole, tuttavia, è che l'incontro di Nono con la Laterna magika, si sia compiuto nel proposito di ricuperare e 'rilanciare' le prove più avanzate del teatro fra le due guerre, da Piscator a Maierhold a Brecht stesso, per un teatro dunque che nel rompere con lo schema convenzionale palcoscenico-pubblico, faccia il secondo attivo protagonista del primo.<sup>60</sup>

[Notable above all, however, is that the collaboration between Nono and Laterna Magika has been accomplished with a view to reviving evidence of the most progressive theatre between the wars, from Piscator to Meyerhold to Brecht himself—a theatre that in breaking with the conventional scheme of the stage versus audience, figure the latter as an active protagonist in the former.]

The purpose of epic theatre was, in other words, to reinvigorate the social possibilities of stage drama.<sup>61</sup> Rather than encourage empathy in the audience, the objectification of characters on stage was to elicit a critical response. A layer of artifice should be brought to the foreground, so that the audience was continually aware that what was being presented was only a *representation* of reality. Their espousal of modernist realism—one that allied avant-garde theatrical means with a depiction of contemporary social problems—became a central aesthetic impetus to the postwar generation of young Italian composers.<sup>62</sup> Press reactions to the perceived rupture between socially realist content and stylised modernist aesthetics in *Intolleranza* suggest that Nono was doing something new: Manzoni, for example, wrote that 'this score constitutes an interesting experience of the fusion of a text with a democratic

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<sup>59</sup> In early sketches for *Intolleranza* there are references to theatrical models: on one page is written: 'Bauhaus. 1919 Bauhaus Weimar—1925 Dessau?' (Source 23.05/ 14, ALN). On another: 'Meyerhold—Taizov ... Piscator/Brecht' (Source 23.05/ 15v, ALN). Nono discussed models of theatre that influenced his conception in 'Spiel und Wahrheit im neuen Musiktheater' [1963], in Stenzl, *Luigi Nono*, 82-86.

<sup>60</sup> Pestalozza, 'Attesa a Venezia per *Intolleranza 1960*'.

<sup>61</sup> This interest in a socially engaged Italian theatre can be traced across various media of the period. Plays such as Giovanni Testori's *Arialda* (produced in 1960 by Visconti, but immediately banned) dealt explicitly with contemporary social problems. As did film: Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960), dealt with similar themes—the urban, industrialised working class in Milan, predominantly made up of migrant workers from the South. The city is portrayed as a bleak world that shatters old Italian values; drug culture, dangerously enticing mass entertainments and the general hustle and bustle of the modern city are seen as producing a lack of social cohesion and a breakdown of traditional family life.

<sup>62</sup> As well as Meyerhold, another precursor from Russian theatre of the 1920s who followed a similar path was Vladimir Mayakovsky.

content [...] with a music that postulates a very current language and technical construction'. What is more, this put Nono 'at the centre of a controversy': to integrate social critique with modernist language was clearly to occupy a contested position.<sup>63</sup>

### Noise, onomatopoeia and aural *realismo*

The second point raised in *L'Unità*, as well as in the broader reception, is a redefinition of realism. This more general category of *realismo* sits rather strangely: whilst the theatrical presentation was decidedly avant-garde, and the content 'popular' in its socialism, the music was judged by the critics to be both modernist and realist. The latter, specifically musical realism was achieved by music often seeming on the edge of noise, a condition that has a resonant Italian genealogy. Arman Schwartz has discussed the limits of musical verismo in Puccini's *Tosca* (1900), highlighting the fact that after the opera's premiere, the press complained that the harsh, noisy sound world pushed the definition of music to its limits, into the antimusical.<sup>64</sup> The aspects denounced in *Tosca*, the 'urban soundscape, *musique concrète*, degree zero of musical meaning', may have been too much for the audience of 1900, but they were to become prized as the most effective facets of *Intolleranza* in 1961.<sup>65</sup> Modernist realism here picked up from the most extreme edges of verismo; as Fuà wrote in the *Giornale del popolo*,

La partitura è tutta tagliente, aggressiva, ferisce e mozza il fiato; non v'è strumento—soprattutto i corni e le trombe—che non sia usato nella sua espressione fonica meno gradevole. Raffiche di suoni duri, agghiaccianti, rabbiosi, stigmatizzano l'orrore della nostra condizione umana.<sup>66</sup>

[The score throughout is sharp, aggressive and breath-taking; all instruments—especially the horns and trumpets—are used in their least attractive register. Gusts of harsh sounds, terrifying and furious, condemn the horror of our human condition.]

For Fernando Lunghi, writing in the *Giornale d'Italia*, 'there are no melodies, neither

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<sup>63</sup> 'questa partitura costituisce una interessante esperienza di fusione di un testo a contenuto democratico [...] con una musica che fa suoi i postulati più attuali di linguaggio e di costruzione tecnica' and 'al centro di una polemica'; Manzoni, '*Intolleranza 1960* stasera a Venezia'.

<sup>64</sup> Schwartz, 'Rough Music: *Tosca* and *Verismo* Reconsidered', *19th-Century Music* 31/3 (2008), 228-44.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>66</sup> Fuà, '*Intolleranza 1960*', *Giornale del popolo* (14 April 1961).

humble nor sublime; in compensation there are noises and gunfire'; it was music composed of 'rarefied sonorities and apocalyptic explosions'.<sup>67</sup> This continual emphasis on *Intolleranza's* noisiness—one of the most remarked upon aspects of the opera—is in part because the power and expressive force of its sound world came to be interpreted as an evocation of Fascist terror and the sounds of war,<sup>68</sup> as M. Ugolini remarked:

a questi contenuti la musica si adegua creando uno sfondo sonoro imperniato quasi costantemente su congestioni timbriche che riescono a dare con precisione 'onomatopeica' una rappresentazione fonica dell'umanità straziata dall'oppressione fascista; così che sembra che nella partitura vengano a confluire le grida dei torturati, il rumore delle armi degli aguzzini, il fragore dei bombardamenti.<sup>69</sup>

[to such content the music adapts, creating a background noise almost constantly centred on closely overlapping timbres that can give an accurate 'onomatopoeic' representation of humanity ravaged by Fascist oppression; so it seems that in the score there is a merging of the cries of the tortured, the noise of torturers' weapons and the din of bombing.]

The level of noise is described as a heightened and vivid realism in the sound world, while the stage action is judged unrealistic in any visual or strictly narrative fashion. The underlying consensus was that this new realism gave the music its political import, despite its absence of broader appeal. Pestalozza writes of Nono that:

tuttavia la sua opera è tanto più interessante e valida, in quanto la si faccia rientrare nella più vasta esigenza di un determinato settore della nostra giovane musica, che di certo costituisce il più serio tentativo in corso per dare forma e sostanza musicali al realismo contemporaneo. *Intolleranza 1960* è appunto, in questa direzione un traguardo raggiunto.<sup>70</sup>

[however, his work is all the more interesting and valid, in that it faces the urgent need among a certain sector of our recent music, and is certainly the

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<sup>67</sup> 'non ci sono melodie, né umili né sublimi; in compenso ci sono strepiti e spari' and 'sonorità rarefatte ed esplosioni apocalittiche'; Fernando Lunghi, '*Intolleranza 1960* di Luigi Nono opera a nastro magnetico e alla lanterna magika', *Giornale d'Italia* (14 April 1961). In 1950, Lunghi had written a defence of the use of music in neorealist film, arguing that music added another dimension to the experience, one which pure naturalism could not provide; see Lunghi, 'La musica e il neorealismo', in Enzo Masetti, ed., *La musica nel film* (Rome: Bianco e Nero, 1950), 56-60.

<sup>68</sup> The idea of the sounds of war is discussed in Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989). An important text—again absent from discussion—is Russolo, 'The Noises of War' [1916], *The Art of Noises*, 49-53.

<sup>69</sup> Ugolini, 'Il nostro dibattito su *Intolleranza 1960* e la musica moderna'.

<sup>70</sup> Pestalozza, [Untitled], *Cinema nuovo*.



most serious effort under way to give musical shape and substance to contemporary realism. *Intolleranza 1960* is precisely, in this sense, a goal achieved.]

Any notion of realism here had clear limits: the production's stylisation, glimpses of the musicians in the pit and the use of a symphony orchestra, demarcated an obvious boundary of believability. However, such discrepancies did not seem to matter. What was important was that as soon as the critics heard the noise and aural realism of *Intolleranza*, they made a connection with Fascism.

The critics' reading of onomatopoeic noise in the premiere thus suggests an understanding of the music as allegorical: the brutality and aural violence, the way the music often tipped into overwhelming noise, was used by the critics to remind their readers of recent history.<sup>71</sup> Such noise was accepted, and indeed emphasised, because it was a reminder of the barbarity of Fascism and the Babel of war; it was meant to shock people out of a neo-bourgeois capitalist existence.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the memory and engagement of the listener seemed to be constantly tested as the work progressed through various instances of self-quotation and intervallic relationships.<sup>73</sup> But if, in his own words, Nono foreground the intellectual over the visceral, the critics' reception instead stressed the visceral over the intellectual.<sup>74</sup> Critical dismissal of the work's

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<sup>71</sup> The main features of allegorical modernism in Italy of this time seemed to be either an evocation of Fascism and war, as here in *Intolleranza*, or of the city, as in Ungaretti's use of Virgil's *Aeneid* as an allegory of *Alexandria*, the place of his birth, in *La terra promessa* (1950) and *Ultimi cori per la terra promessa* (1960); Nono had set the former in his *Cori di Didone* (1958).

<sup>72</sup> Another significant omission from the reception is any mention of the Risorgimento: this was the centenary year after all, with a grand *Italia61* Exhibition of Italian unification held in Turin. Contemporary commentaries elsewhere on the importance of remembering Fascism almost without exception refer to unification.

<sup>73</sup> The fourth movement of *Il canto sospeso* is inserted as an interlude between scenes four and five of Part One. Thus one of the most expressive and emotive moments from the earlier work is used to connect two of *Intolleranza*'s most harrowing scenes: that of the police interrogation and torture. In the second Part, the opening of the second of Nono's *Due espressioni* (1953) is re-used as an accompaniment to racial graffiti at bb. 294-313. Furthermore, Nono maintained that intervallic relationships underpin the association between characters and the drama. He cited the example of the development of the relationship between the Emigrant and the Woman, which, he claimed, was done through the use of four intervals: minor and major seconds, a perfect fourth and a tritone; see Nono, 'Einige genauere Hinweise zu *Intolleranza*' [1962], 68.

<sup>74</sup> Although the lead soprano in the Boston staging of *Intolleranza* in 1965, Beverly Sills, recalls that at times Nono called for noisy realism rather than verbal comprehensibility: 'At one point in the opera I had an aria entitled "Ban the Bomb", which contained a phrase "the screaming voices of Hiroshima", on the "shi" in "Hiroshima" I had to hit a high C-sharp. I tried to explain to Mr Nono that on a note that high the text would be indecipherable and so it would be better to sing the word "Hiroshima" on a lower note so that people could understand. "No," he said, he wanted the high C-sharp to sound like the screaming of the bomb itself; Sills, *Bubbles: A Self Portrait* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 100.

intellectual heritage was also evident in responses to the fact that its noisy urbanity, the integration of the sounds of modern warfare and the city within the realm of an aesthetic modernism, was seemingly assimilated into a framework indebted to Schoenberg, namely his *Die glückliche Hand* (1910-13) and *Survivor from Warsaw* (1947).<sup>75</sup> René Leibowitz's *L'Artiste et sa conscience* (1950), a book widely read by the European avant-garde, had named *Survivor from Warsaw* as an important example of commitment in music.<sup>76</sup> What is interesting here is that, as Friedrich Spangemacher put it: 'When Nono then refers once more explicitly to Schönberg in his first piece of music theatre ... he no longer does it with regard to specific questions of compositional technique and structures, but rather with regard to the conception of theatre'.<sup>77</sup> In other words, Schoenberg provided a model for doing away with the sacralisation of opera, for devising a new system of music and text relationships, and for a new concept of sound spatialisation.<sup>78</sup> In the reception of *Intolleranza*, however, this use of Schoenberg was seen as incongruous in the context of noise for its own sake. For Duse, Schoenberg transmuted into the postwar milieu resulted in music devoid of any political import—with a stagnant artificiality that hindered *Intolleranza's* visceral force. In the responses that followed, the consensus was that the use of Schoenberg stopped the music from having broader appeal. The centrality of this aesthetic modernism in the reconfiguration of realism—the preoccupation with popularity and ultimately the concern with what a postwar Italian culture should be—in the end put too much weight on too contested a musical language.

## Modernist realism: noise and memories of Fascism

A sense of imminence and urgency shadowed these debates: the rhetoric used to

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<sup>75</sup> The inside cover of the score reads 'Arnold Schoenberg gewidmet'. The year before the premiere of *Intolleranza*, at Darmstadt, Nono discussed the relationship between text and music, making reference to Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*, claiming it 'the manifesto of our era'. It was fellow Venetian Gian Francesco Malipiero who introduced Nono to Schoenberg's music, during Nono's studies with Malipiero in Venice in 1941; see Stenzl, *Luigi Nono*.

<sup>76</sup> Friedrich Spangemacher speculates that Nono may in fact have got to know René Leibowitz at the 1949 twelve-tone conference in Milan. Although Nono disagreed with Leibowitz's advocacy of socialist realism, Spangemacher suggests that it may have been from Leibowitz that Nono came to know Jean-Paul Sartre's writing on committed literature; see Spangemacher, 'Schoenberg as Role Model... On the Relationship between Luigi Nono and Arnold Schoenberg', *Contemporary Music Review* 18/1 (1999), 31-46.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> See Nono, 'Text—Musik—Gesang' [1960], in Stenzl, *Luigi Nono*, 41-60; and Nono, 'Notizen zum Musiktheater Heute' [1961].

discuss the interface between popularity and realism quickly became inflammatory. Indeed, after attending the premiere of *Intolleranza* Vigolo wrote that ‘What *Intolleranza 1960* has is the singular sense of catastrophe we feel incumbent on our age’.<sup>79</sup> That the debate quickly slid into state-of-the-nation questions on the function of art in society shows that there was some sort of crisis amongst the Left, and that the categories of popular and realist, although clearly of great importance, were heavily contested. The nature of this crisis was twofold: on the one hand it concerned the ways the Left sought to rebuild an Italian postwar culture; on the other, it concerned an increasing anxiety over the use of modernist musical means. Despite these differences, however, there persisted a curiosity about the surface expressive power of the music of *Intolleranza* as evocative of the political. Amid the cultural reconstruction and planning for the future of 1961, there remained concern that a recent past must not be forgotten; the opera’s politicisation of the sounds of war fed into the anxiety of memory through auralty: above all the fact that the horrors of Fascism could be recalled through sound.<sup>80</sup>

This is where praise for Nono’s techniques of immersion comes in. The consolidation of American-style capitalism, fuelled by Italy’s economic miracle, the established pre-eminence of cinema and ascendancy of television, provoked an engagement with these mass cultural media within elite genres such as opera. The espousal of this new type of theatre and the assertion of Nono’s achievements in leftist literature suggests an attempt to regain cultural hegemony. An interesting line of influence between opera and film is thus exposed. What is also intriguing is how this influence is centred on reconfigurations of realism. Indeed, realism seems to become the mode *par excellence* for interpreting Italian modernism.<sup>81</sup> If in the earliest decades of the century we have operatic verismo, its noisiness constrained by a need for *bel canto*; then there was a filmic visual realism playing on the earlier operatic themes,

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<sup>79</sup> ‘Ciò che la *Intolleranza 1960* ha di singolare è questo senso di catastrofe che sentiamo incombere sulla nostra epoca’; Vigolo, ‘*Intolleranza 1960*’.

<sup>80</sup> This focus on sound could be seen as a turning away from the standard narratives on the visual-centricity of the Fascist period, in which the regime is assumed to be concerned first and foremost with spectacle; see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For more on the confluences of memory and history after the traumas of the Second World War, see Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> Realism as a theoretical construct having continuity across the various phases of the century is also discussed in Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

such as in Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945); now, finally, we have music theatre going beyond operatic verismo and turning neorealist film on its head, a *realismo* of sheer noise, with just enough *bel canto* to make sure that culture still triumphs over barbarity.<sup>82</sup>

Rather than hunt for a definition of realism, this chapter has suggested some of the impulses that the need for an aesthetic *realismo* show up. With *Intolleranza*, the importance of realism feeds into the topos of memory: the memory of both the recent world war and Fascism; the memory that Nono in turn uses as a critique of class oppression in 1961. *Intolleranza's* undoing is that this musico-political project was achieved through modernist realism, the allusive style of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Woolf's *Jacob's Room*—works that resound with elitist European heritage. Just as, in order to grasp the resonances of *The Waste Land*, one arguably requires some knowledge of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Ancient Greek, the Old Testament and late nineteenth-century music aesthetics; so in *Intolleranza* one needs an acquaintance with the previous fifty years of Western high modernist art music, literary models such as Kafka, historical revolutionary theatres such as that of pre-Soviet Russia and the Venetian choral heritage. The problem with *Intolleranza* is that the need for understanding its allusions and allegories, for multiple re-hearings and knowledge of its intellectual history, seems to jar with its supposed political import. Ultimately, perhaps, it matters little whether the references are grasped the first time around. Perhaps that is what the noise is there for.

The production and reception of *Intolleranza*, particularly in *L'Unità*, show more than anything the class-ridden antagonism that blighted the postwar Italian landscape. The historical advocates of the working class, the intellectual Left, could not keep up with the burgeoning mass media. The crisis of the Left was in part a realisation of increasing obsolescence. In this sense, *Intolleranza* provides a reminder of high modernity in its death throes, of a modernist realism that goes beyond both *verismo* and neorealism while inheriting their problems. The work also marks a transition to the capitalist Italy of *la bella figura*, of the empty hedonism of Dino Risi's *Il sorpasso* (1962) and, particularly in Venice, of museum-style tourism. The echoes

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<sup>82</sup> There are also dialogues with the realisms of other media: with nineteenth-century literary *verismo*, a resurgent literary neorealism in the early fiction of Italo Calvino and a post-Second World War modernist realist art movement inspired by Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), to name the most prominent manifestations.

that resounded at the premiere of *Intolleranza*, of opera history and Venetian heritage, were in other words a veil of artificiality covering the realities onstage, an artificiality needed for reality to become *realismo*. By the time the Emigrant is washed away, stripped of his bare life and devoid of a voice in the noise that marks his demise, any reality that adhered to his plight was already becoming fiction.

## Conclusion

### Out of the Ashes: Opera in Postwar Venice

Dino Buzzati's second collection of short stories, *Paura alla Scala* (1949), begins with a tale of the same name; it recounts contemporary social conflict through the story of a night at the opera.<sup>1</sup> The Milanese bourgeoisie are gathered in the foyer of the city's renowned opera house for a performance of Pierre Grossgemüth's *La strage degli innocenti*. The occasion—a much hyped media event of an Italian premiere by a famous foreign composer—resonates with the case studies in this thesis. An opera based on a biblical tale, it also portrays an allegory of Nazi atrocity. Just as in 1924, a police search warrant was put in place to inspect those who entered the theatre—an attempt to prevent rebellious activity. Yet danger lurked outside in the city. During the first interval, news reports arrive of a revolution under way on the streets of Milan: a group of dissidents has seemingly taken advantage of the fact that the elite are at the opera. The audience decide it is safer to spend the night at the theatre, rather than risk the streets at night.

A parable of real life events—of rightwing fears of a resurgent Left under Palmiro Togliatti in the build up to the 1948 elections—it uses a gala evening at the opera to tell a story of class antagonism in the aftermath of the Second World War. But it also plays on deeper themes and tensions. The iconic place of Italian opera may have become the last refuge of the bourgeoisie, but there is also a more unsettling, pervasive sense of crisis and immanent catastrophe, as well as of fear-induced compromise. Despite an ongoing cultural tradition and national heritage, the unpredictable and unexpected reign supreme. The possibility of aesthetic retreat or escape from contemporary turbulence and fear is negated: opera in whatever form—even a timely work of the avant-garde—has become hopelessly removed from what is happening outside.

Buzzati's short story is one possible response to an initial conundrum this thesis posed: how to be anti-Fascist when the situation under the regime was principally one of aesthetic pluralism. 'Paura alla Scala' suggests opera and its audiences were becoming irremediably divorced from the political reality of the aftermath of the

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<sup>1</sup> Dino Buzzati, *Paura alla Scala* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011 [1949]).

*ventennio*. Indeed the story tells a prophetic tale for the ensuing decade: the sense of threat felt by those who enjoyed a night at the opera, increasingly entrenched political divides that had cultural repercussions, and a relentless and all-pervasive perception of crisis. The story also indicates possible lines of enquiry in attempting to answer another question I posed at the start of this thesis: why did certain discourses resurface at specific moments in the century? I want to propose here that a determining factor was precisely these ongoing perceptions of crisis that both instigated and followed in the wake of key moments in the first half of the twentieth century. This theme took on prominence as the thesis progressed. I did not set out to write a thesis about crisis, but, as the chapters have shown, what is most marked about mid-century musical and social discourse is the relentless sense of imminent catastrophe that shadowed debate. However, I also want to see through this pervasive rhetoric to uncover what it hid from view: the continuities across supposedly watershed moments or perceptions of change, the productivity such rhetoric seemed to instil, and a lingering sense of hope formed even in the face of the most threatening spheres of cultural activity (such as the mass media).

In coming to terms with its past and reinventing itself in the aftermath of war and Fascism, Italy seemed to have constant recourse to a sense of crisis. The historian John Dickie has written about ‘a patriotism of pathos’ that marked the post-Fascist era, which consisted of an ‘inverted patriotism’ of constant worry and pessimism over the nation-state, its culture and identity.<sup>2</sup> In musical debate, this seemed to centre above all on the direction of musical language and culture. ‘Inverted patriotism’ found its place in a constant preoccupation over the state of opera, the appropriateness of modernism in the Italian situation and the role that music could play in postwar reconstruction. What is perhaps most striking, then, is the sheer multiplicity of crises.<sup>3</sup>

One corollary of this sense of crisis was a concern with the popularity of opera, something that seemed to have become entwined with the plight of the Left in Italy. If the Communists had long held a position of cultural authority, intensified after

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<sup>2</sup> John Dickie, ‘The Notion of Italy’, in Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [2001]), 17–33, here 29.

<sup>3</sup> As the historian Sidney Tarrow puts it: ‘Il caso italiano è quello di una crisi almeno *multiforme*, e quasi sicuramente anche *di lungo periodo*’ (The Italian case is of a crisis that is at least *multiform* and almost certainly *long-term*); Tarrow, ‘Aspetti della crisi italiana: note introduttive’, trans. Guido Franzinetti, in Luigi Graziano and Tarrow, eds., *La crisi italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 3–40, here 4.

having lost much of their political power after the 1948 elections, then this authority was predominantly in the realm of *cultura* in the Italian sense. The majority of Communists still proposed a top-down model of the influence of intellectuals on the masses (determining and promoting *cultura popolare*). As we have encountered in each of the chapters, however, the problem was that they failed to recognise that their vision of *cultura popolare* was becoming extinct—merging instead into a *cultura di massa*. The Left continued to see the latter, somewhat ironically, as a manipulation of consumers by pernicious powers, long after the huge proliferation of mass media across the first half of the century had rendered the situation more complicated. Part of this hostility to mass culture may have been a result of the Left's awareness that to forego a more old-fashioned vision of popular culture would have meant relinquishing their cultural and political authority. As we have seen in the course of this dissertation, leftist critics seemed to realise the need to reinforce opera as a genre still capable of speaking to the masses, and the need to democratise music criticism (even if that ultimately meant relinquishing their own position), as well as evolving new concepts of the 'popular' for opera in postwar society. In other words, a loss of supremacy to the field of mass culture would inevitably mean obsolescence on all fronts.

A second topic that emerged across the chapters, then, is the importance of mass media in opera discourse. Each case study became an examination of a moment of conflict between the need to exploit the means such media provided and a wariness about their growing hegemony. The continuation of older genres also seemed to be premised on the need to compete with the experiences new media were seen to elicit. Fundamentally, however, many on the Left seemed to have been locked into seeing mass culture as having an underlying conservative agenda. Such a perspective could in part have been the result of memories of the Fascist use of media such as the radio remaining fresh in national consciousness (even if less explicit in discourse). In this sense, Italian leftist critics shared a similar mode of critique with contemporary transnational discourses on the media. For example, their demonization of mass culture had much in common with Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944): of mass culture in capitalist society as a factory churning out goods (magazines, films, radio, etc.), which ultimately end up



falsely satisfying and thus stultifying the public.<sup>4</sup> Concerns over the impact of real-life factory production even found their own echoes in Italian debate on the media.

In addition, despite newer media such as radio and cinema dominating debate, it was print media that fuelled the activity and did most of the recording of operatic events for posterity. There was also a discursive trope of imaginary and emergent media: how important a particular medium was in discussion often took no account of how ubiquitous it was (or even whether it existed). Television, for example, was long conceived as a threat to opera before it was actually introduced. Thus although the importance of mass media and new technologies is often seen to have crystallised around the years of the economic miracle, this thesis has shown that in fact many of the debates took place much earlier in the 1950s—a period that has tended to be viewed as overshadowed by the collapse of Fascism and the aftermath of war.<sup>5</sup> But while processes of modernisation were under way almost immediately, from the later 1940s and into the 1950s, there was simultaneously an awareness of the need for the public not to lose sight of their own historical positioning. The leftist debate on the media embodied this divide: on the one hand, such means were seen as increasing passivity and inertia in the populace; on the other hand they were seen as empowering the public and instigating change.

This dual concern with the empowerment of the public while also awakening them from a state of stultification is one other response to the issue of how to be aesthetically anti-Fascist in the postwar period. During the 1950s this preoccupation formed around the importance of *impegno* (commitment). What is particularly striking is that this aesthetic position was applied above all to modernist and avant-garde activity. Critics and commentators recognised that art had to be stylistically at the forefront of transnational activity, while not losing sight of its ethical purpose. The difficulties of reconciling such a position were endlessly debated in the scholarly and mainstream press. And this only intensified as the 1950s progressed: if there was a sense in the immediate postwar period of the need to move on, by the late 1950s there seemed to be a concern with national remembering. This is perhaps why Nono's

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<sup>4</sup> T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury Press, 1972 [1944]).

<sup>5</sup> A similar point has been made by David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, who say that although 1950s' culture is often seen as a 'primitive forerunner' of the mass culture of the 1960s, it was in fact 'a decisive stage in the slow gestation of that era'; see Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 1.

*Intolleranza 1960* came to be the most positively received and discussed opera of those considered here: it directly touched on the uneasy relationship between musical modernism and the contemporary cultural politics of memory and popularity.

The reception of *Intolleranza* also points to other aspects of activity that seemed to carry disruptive potential: noise, the visceral and the crowd. By 1959 noise possessed a particular valence in critical discourse (although one, as we have seen, that had direct precursors in 1924): a tool for engaging the public as well as a vehicle for auditory memory. Noise and popularity came together under the aesthetic value of the visceral: whether in the noisy power of Verdi's *Attila* or the sounds of war and industry in *Intolleranza* and in Alberto Bruni Tedeschi's *Diagramma circolare*. Given the normally didactic and esoteric nature of early to mid-century Italian criticism, and the positioning of intellectuals in discourse, what is marked in the reception of the case studies under scrutiny here is that there was a continual emphasis (normally as a positive attribute) on the visceral power of the work. The visceral again posed one way of trying to stir the masses out of the perceived apathy induced by mass media; but also, perhaps, it was seen as an attempted re-enlivening of the opera house as a site of agitation and activism.

The crowd as a symbol of the masses displayed these vacillations: whether contained in reverential silence at the death of opera, stirring noisy revolution provoked by events on stage, or simply dangerous and anarchic, the crowd remained a potent but unruly force, an embodiment of leftist contradiction. Collective emotion and sensory experience were also tied up with the importance of the crowd. This is not emotion in Alberto Banti's sense of a canon of patriotic literature and other cultural products embodying *risorgimentale* emotion, but rather how national sentiment was articulated in response to aesthetic experience.<sup>6</sup> Emotional reaction was seen as an effect of the visceral: Verdi could still be popular if his music continued to inspire unthinking emotion; *Intolleranza* could provide a path out of opera crisis if its noisy effects could enliven the public.

The picture that the various case studies offer is therefore one of continuity and discontinuity, of complicated and contradictory historical trajectories: if the early 1950s seemed to be more about forgetting the recent past, the early 1960s were more

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<sup>6</sup> See Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* (Turin: Einaudi 2000); and *L'onore della nazione. Identità sessuali e violenza nel nazionalismo europeo dal XVIII secolo alla Grande Guerra* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

about remembering it; if the main media threats were initially radio and cinema, by 1961 it was television; if 1951 was about new opera embodying opera crisis, a decade later anti-opera was seen as providing a path out of malaise; if popularity in 1951 meant enjoying the nation's operatic heritage, by 1961 it was defined in response to a politicised idea of commitment; if in the earlier part of the decade eclecticism was a modernist response to the increasingly ossified opera museum, by 1959 it was symbolic of an ahistorical flattening of musical style—order giving way to plurality, with no sense of distance between past and present. Furthermore, just as we have discovered that much of what has been seen as synonymous with the economic miracle was in fact taking place earlier in the decade, so the immediate postwar period can be seen as much as looking back to the nineteenth century as into the future—in its emphasis on noise, the crowd, the opera museum and crisis. More specifically, culture by this point was shaped as much by looking back to *bel canto* and the glories of the nation's operatic heritage as it was to embracing the experiences of new mass communication technologies and touristic futures. However, there was no linearity or conformity to these processes: things could suddenly change at random, but much stayed the same over large periods of time.

This particular postwar decade was thus characterised by a series of paradoxes and ambivalences, processes of rewriting and contestation that negate any overarching theme. What this thesis has shown, above all, is that by the mid-century the relationship between the avant-garde, opera crisis and mass culture was not as polarised as critics and cultural figures at the time sought to claim (and as subsequent histories have often suggested). If we look through their polemics, to the pragmatics of opera production and reception, a different picture emerges—of an uneasy but ultimately productive nexus between the three. Indeed one point my thesis has continually sought to emphasise is that even by the 1950s opera still aroused energy, discussion and evinced a certain vitality, despite awareness of it as a museum spectacle and all the lugubriousness that implied. There was a lingering sense that the genre had not been entirely supplanted by modern culture, and that was what the Left in particular clung on to.

The situation of a vitalised museum was only enhanced by the Venetian backdrop and by the broader Italian predicament. The geographical locale, with its inherent contradictions and paradoxes, became a fitting stage for the contested and

uncertain terrain of a period seen as the climax of high modernism, but which—as I hope to have shown—was continually counterbalanced by contrary stories. We could, in this way, argue for a vernacular *tinta* to this particular spotlight on the nexus between opera discourse, modernism and mass culture. I do not mean a ‘vernacular modernism’ in the sense outlined by Miriam Hansen—‘an industrially-produced, mass-based, vernacular modernism’—but of ‘vernacular’ as specific modes of discourse inflected by more local predicaments: municipal responses to processes of modernisation, memories of war and national struggle, and the continuities and discontinuities of heritage and tradition.<sup>7</sup> Crisis, the visceral (noise, crowd, emotion) and mass media were to shadow and project opera and music theatre as they continued their journey into the mid-century and beyond. Amid the ruin and devastation of war, opera culture emerged out of the ashes as a space for engaging with the past and the future in the name of the present—a late attempt to show that things could be otherwise.

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<sup>7</sup> Miriam Hansen, ‘The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism’, *Modernism/Modernity* 6/2 (1999), 59-77, here 65.

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